

WHY REY MISTERIO JR. IS A CUT ABOVE

THE WRESTLER

Wrestler[®]

JANUARY 2003

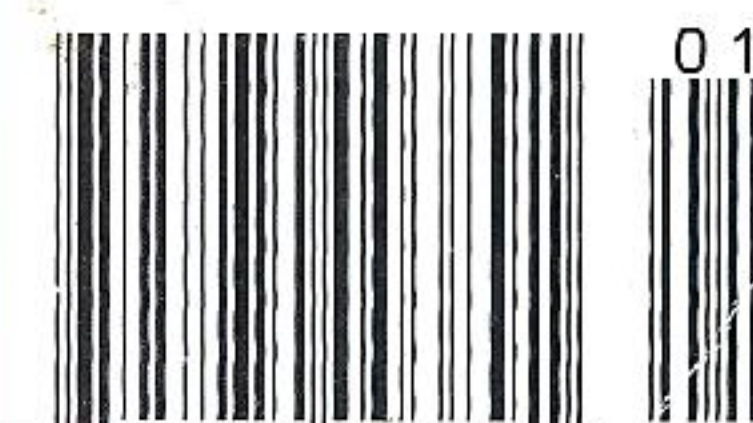


**WARR
GAMES!**

**WWE IS OUT OF CONTROL ...
AND VINNIE MAC LOVES IT!**

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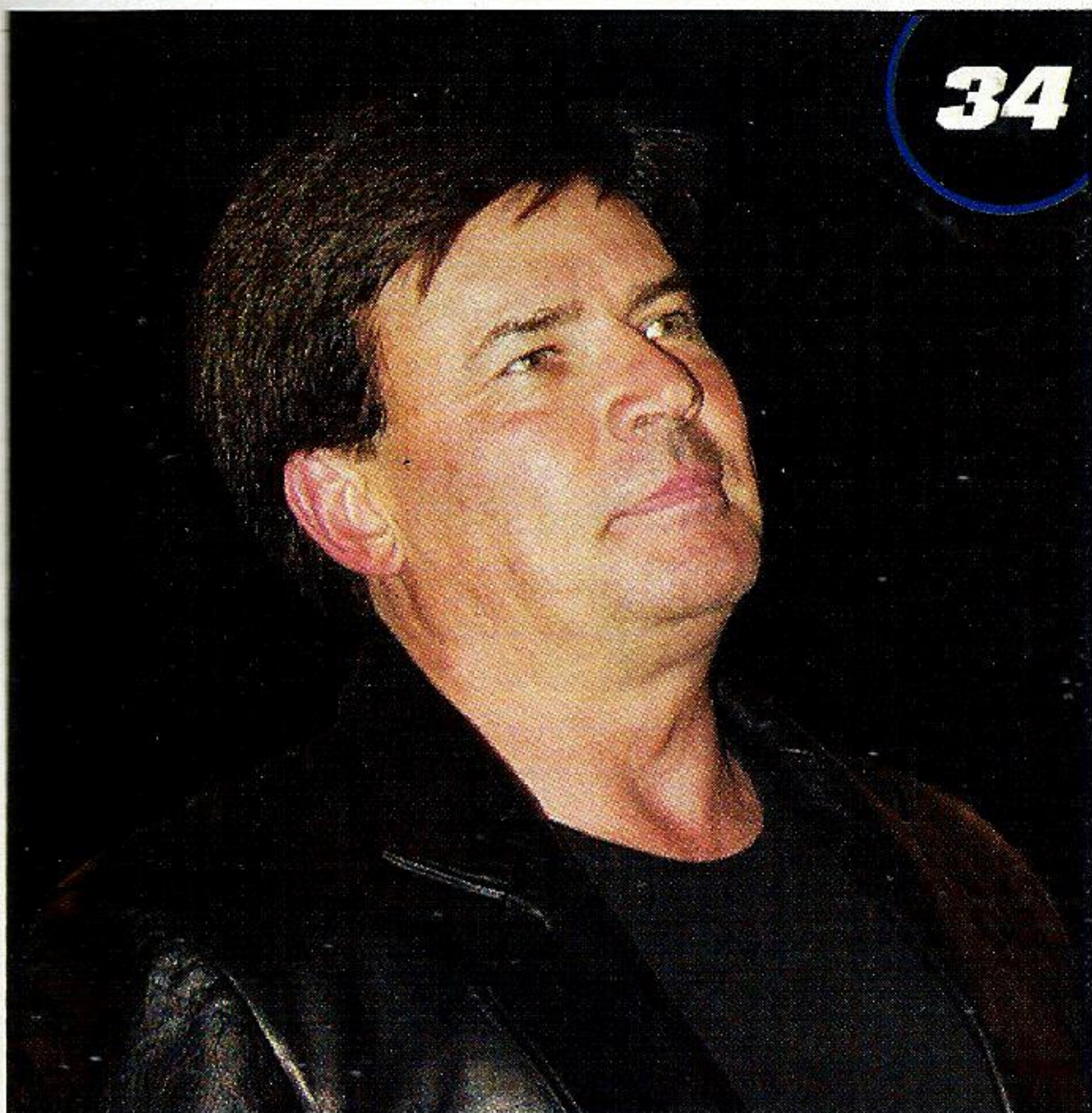
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January 2003

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The rival GM idea was a stroke of genius. With Eric Bischoff in charge of *Raw* and Stephanie running *Smackdown*, we finally have a sense of competition between the two WWE brands, and it's made for compelling TV. Don't miss this in-depth look at the new rivalry, where it's heading, possible future talent raids, who each GM might/might not want, and much, much more!

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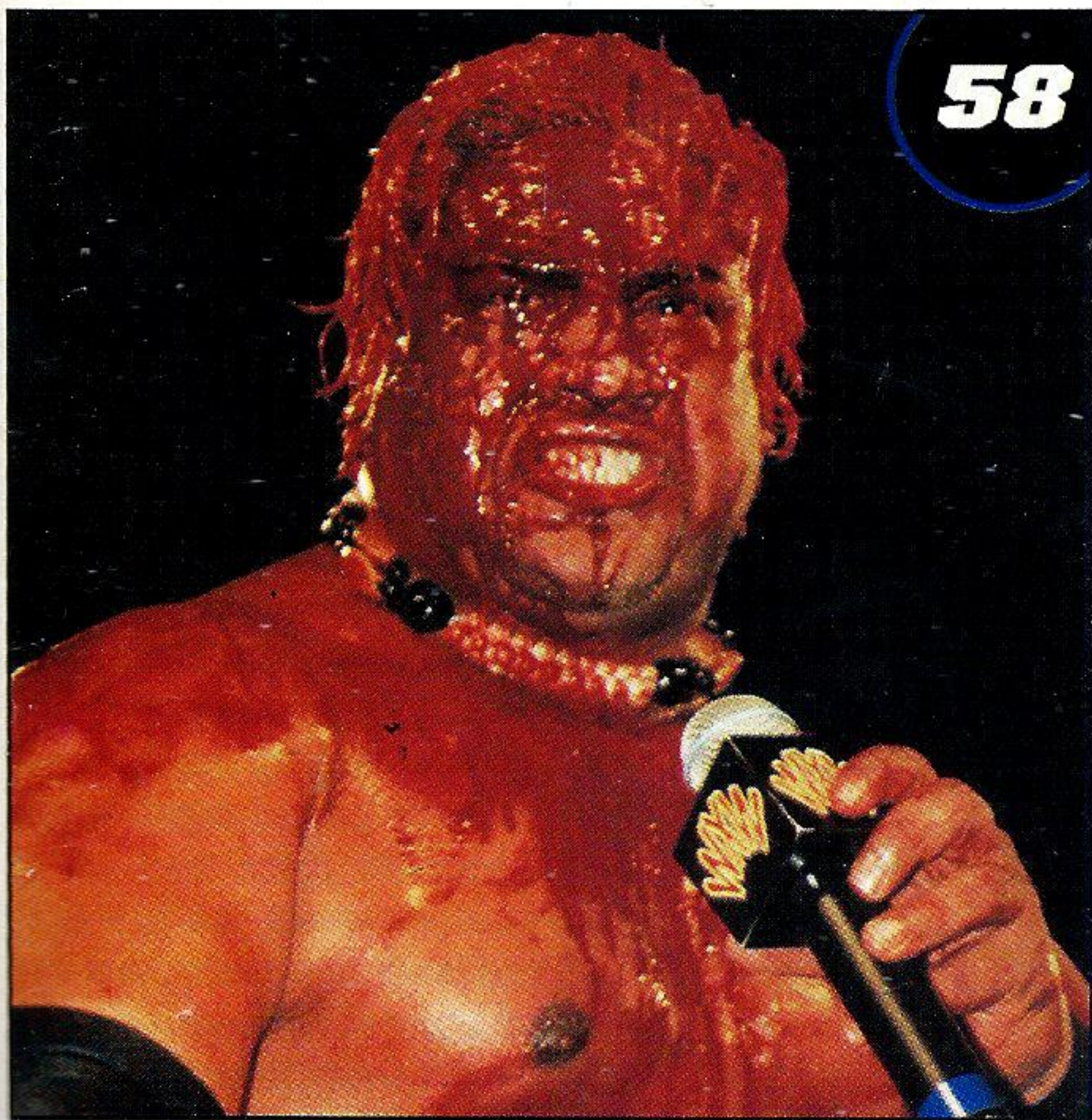
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COVER PHOTO:

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Walt Schmidt

Look for the March 2003 issue of The Wrestler on sale December 17, 2002

your letters

THE POWER OF "HULKAMANIA"

I have been a wrestling fan since I was a kid in the late-1960s, when I used to idolize Pepper Gomez and Ray Stevens. In fact, I went to high school with Stevens' two children. I have also been a fan of Hulk Hogan since the early-1980s. It was only recently that I realized we are the same age.

His comeback couldn't have happened at a better time for me. I was diagnosed with colon cancer at the beginning of the year. I underwent six weeks of chemotherapy and radiation, and then I was admitted to the hospital for extensive surgery. While the surgery was a success, I am undergoing another 18 weeks of chemotherapy to kill off any more cancerous cells.



This photo of Wahoo McDaniel was surely taken early in one of his matches with Ric Flair because, as reader David M. Bradley Sr. will attest, neither man has shed any blood. Bradley was saddened to hear about Wahoo's death.

I almost wanted to give up in this very trying time of my life ... until I saw Hulk Hogan on television, making his comeback to the WWF after a nine-year absence. Watching him reach deep down for strength is just the inspiration I needed to get through my own ordeal.

Knowing that Hogan has endured the physical demands of WWE, and suffered the passing of his father, I wanted him to know how much he has helped me.

Thank you, Mr. Bollea, and good luck with your career.

LARRY POWERS
Boise, ID

LAST OF THE IMMORTALS

Reading Harry Burkett's "Blind-sided" column on the late Wahoo McDaniel brought back some wonderful wrestling memories. Burkett got to see Mid-Atlantic Champion-

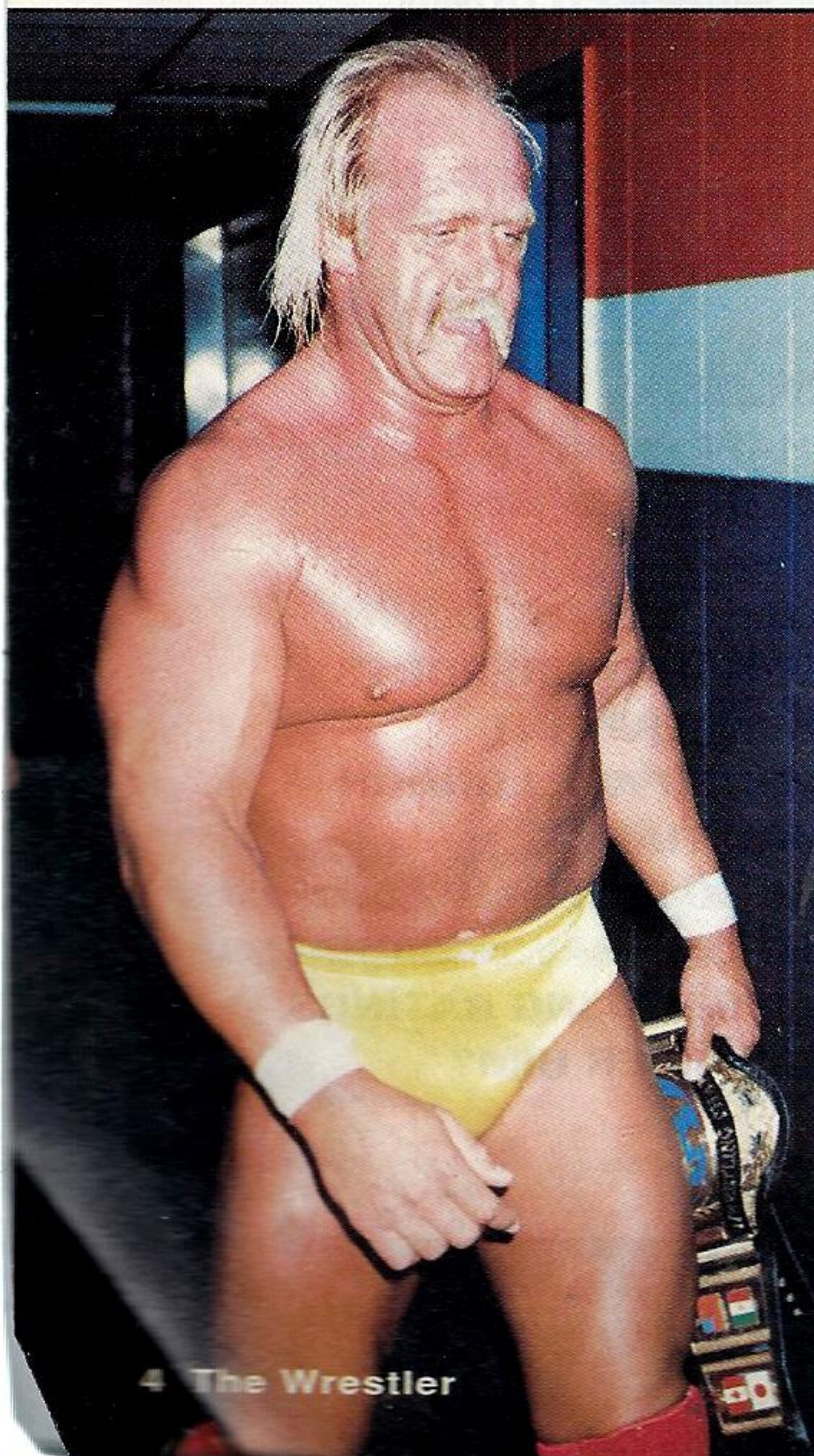
Hulk Hogan has been entertaining reader Larry Powers since the heyday of "Hulkamania," but it wasn't until Hogan made his big WWE comeback earlier this year that he really made a difference in Powers' life.

ship Wrestling on channel 41, while I saw it on WTVR channel 6 in Richmond, Virginia. Wahoo was my favorite.

I remember when Don Muraco turned against Wahoo in their first tag team match together. Big mistake. In the feud that followed, Muraco barely survived Wahoo's barrage of chops and double-underhook suplexes. Wahoo's trademark moves were always a thrill.

I watched Wahoo and Ric Flair go at it on several occasions, mostly in Indian strap or cage matches. Talk about blood. Anytime they met, the winner came out looking like the loser ... and the loser looked even worse! At one show, I sat in the third row at ringside and watched Wahoo take Ric's head and drag it down the length of the steel fencing. Once at the corner, Wahoo rammed Ric's head into the turnbuckle. Then it was back to being dragged down the fencing again. The blood was squirting!

Over the years, I was also privileged to witness his matches against Johnny Valentine, the Andersons, Baron Von Raschke, and Manny



Fernandez. I never saw an arena match in which Wahoo didn't bleed. He even bled on TV a few times.

I'm very sorry he has died, and very sorry he never won the big gold. For some reason, the powers-that-be never let that happen. He would have made a great champ, though.

I revere the days when wrestlers were real men cut from the mold of immortality. Just think of Wahoo, immortal in the minds of the fans!

DAVID M. BRADLEY SR.
dkrashaon@aol.com

HOORAY FOR TNA!

Hats off to the Jarretts and NWA-TNA! For many years, I enjoyed going to the Evansville (Indiana) Coliseum for Jerry Jarrett's exciting CWA, and later USWA, cards on Wednesday nights. Now he is giving me a reason to look forward to Wednesday nights again.

Being familiar with the Jarrett product, I was willing to shell out \$9.95 for the first NWA-TNA show and I am now hooked. It is a fresh alternative to the stale, redundant WWE parade of standup comic wannabes. Finally, there is a promotion with respect for the wrestling business and its glorious history.

The matches are serious, fast-paced thrillers featuring a variety of top-notch young talent. The interviews are pertinent, well-done segments that bear no resemblance to the corny, staged-looking WWE backstage nonsense. Each weekly NWA-TNA show has improved dramatically over the previous one, and the X division is the best thing going in wrestling today.

For anyone disenchanted with Vince McMahon's Monday and Thursday night offerings, I highly recommend the Jarretts' Wednesday night thrillers.

Paul Heyman is sadly mistaken. NWA-TNA is the next big thing!

DAVID MILLER
Oaktown, IN

TIME WASTED

I'm thrilled to see my all-time favorite ECW wrestler, Tommy Dreamer, finally getting a push in WWE. A nice reign or two as hardcore champion is a good start for a man who redefined hardcore wrestling in ECW, but I hope it's *just* a start for him. What bothers me is that the creative team made him look like a joke for so long when he was drinking toilet water and used tobacco juice. The fans who didn't follow him in ECW must not know what to think. Is he really this gross guy, or is he a hardcore warrior? He should have been allowed to be extreme from the moment he showed up in WWE.

REGGIE FARWELL
White Plains, NY
(Continued on page 74)



Tommy Dreamer has taken his wrestling back to the extreme, and that's good news to Reggie Farwell, who loved watching him in ECW and couldn't figure out why he was portrayed differently until recently in WWE.

THE Wrestler

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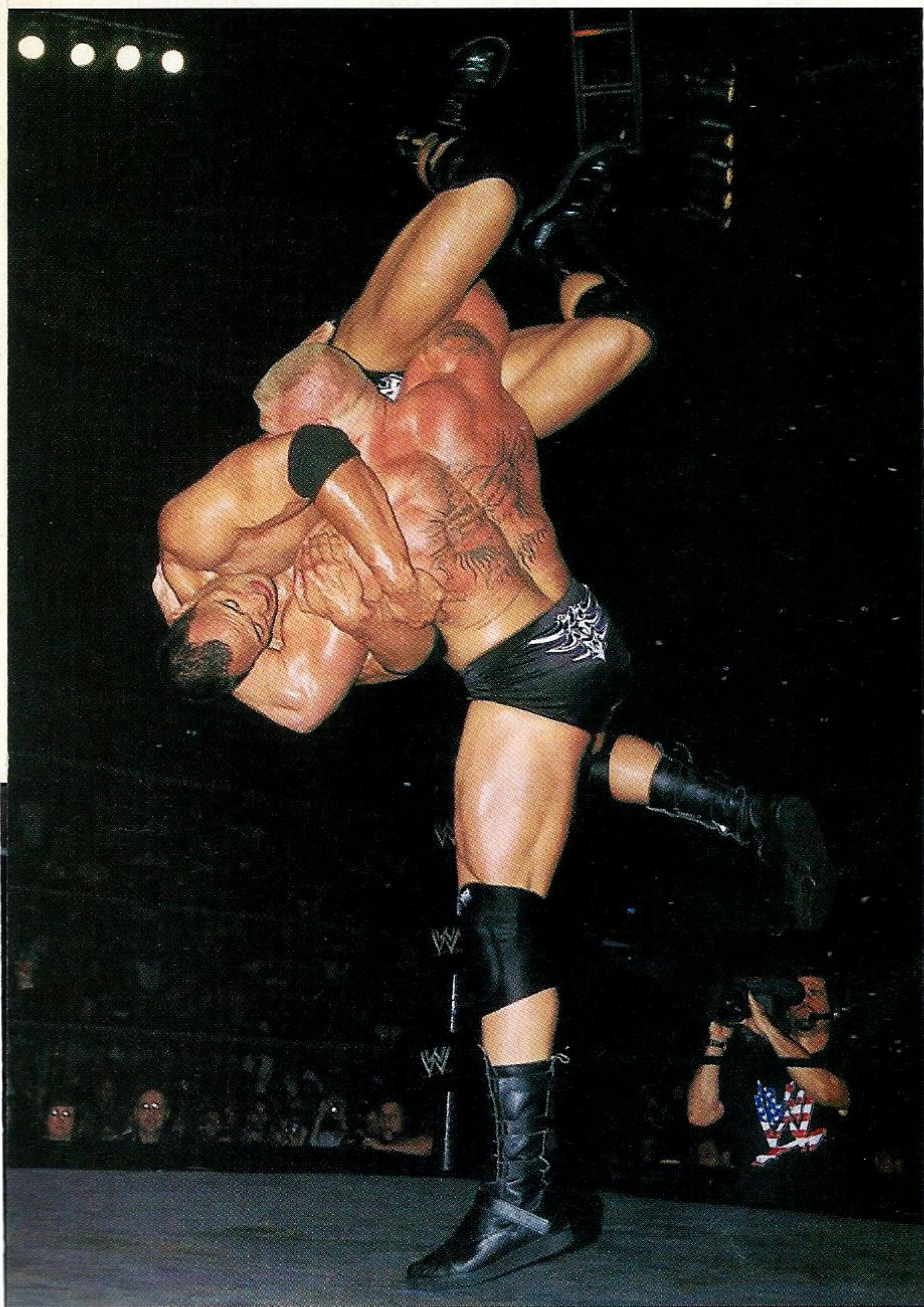
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what's happening?

By Dan Murphy



Brock Lesnar scored a very impressive win over The Rock to win the WWE World title at SummerSlam, but within 24 hours of his triumph, controversies surrounding his relationship with agent Paul Heyman and his decision to apparently defend the title only on *Smackdown* shows swirled around him.

PAUL HEYMAN'S DEAL with the devil may have put Brock Lesnar's undisputed WWE title reign in jeopardy, and it could have Heyman in major trouble with "The Next Big Thing."

Less than 24 hours after Lesnar's World title victory over The Rock at SummerSlam, Stephanie McMahon announced

the new champion would only defend the belt on *Smackdown*, ostensibly leaving *Raw* contenders such as Triple-H, The Undertaker, and Rob Van Dam with no chance of winning the World title as long as Brock remains champ. Stephanie's surprise announcement led WWE locker room sources to speculate that she and former Alliance partner Heyman had made a pact that would protect Lesnar while boosting ratings for *Smackdown*.

However, Stephanie double-crossed Heyman and signed Undertaker to a *Smackdown* contract, putting Lesnar on a collision course with "Big Evil." Lesnar, meanwhile, reportedly was furious at what he saw as a lack of confidence from his agent.

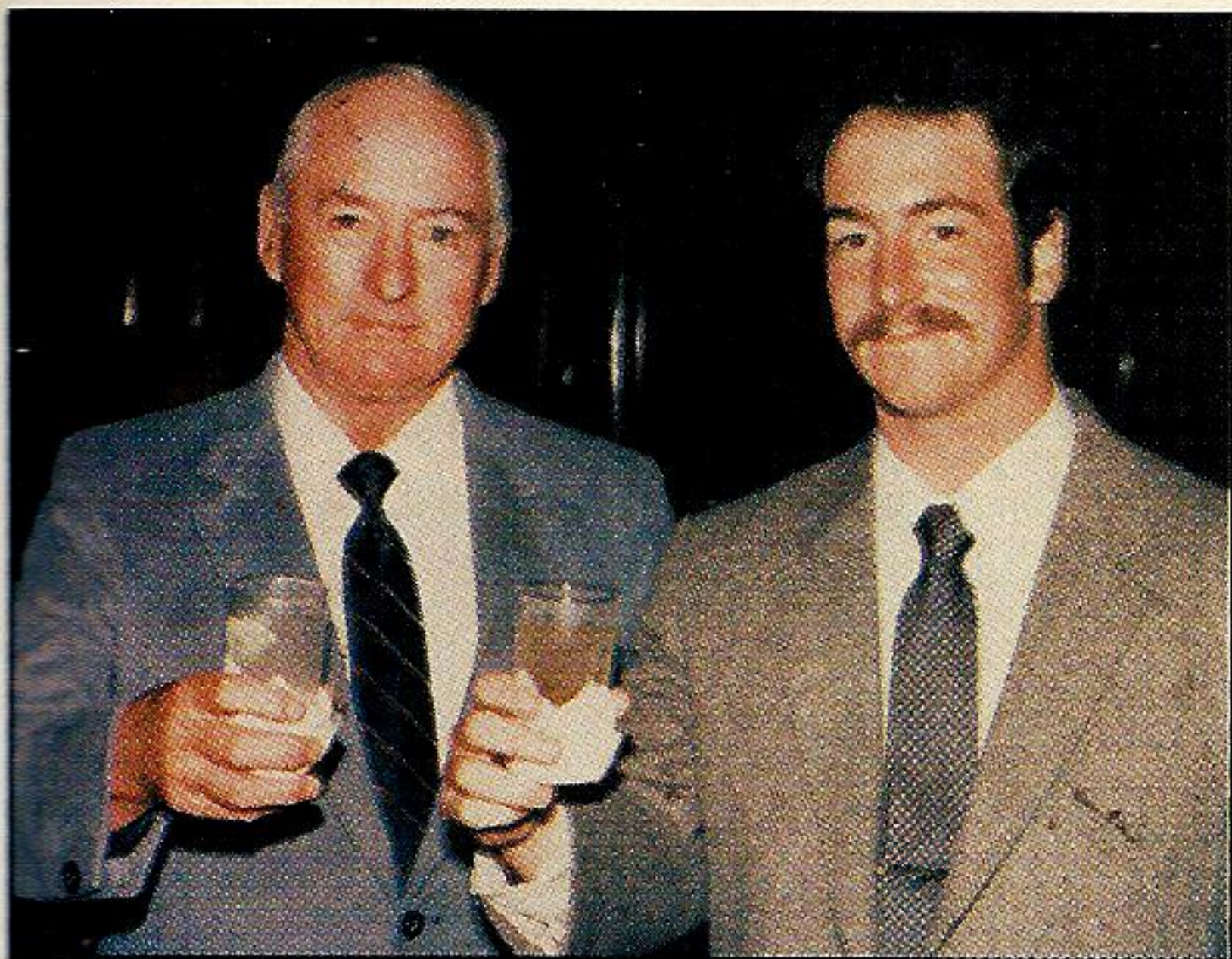
"Lesnar truly wants to face the best competition WWE has to offer," said WWE analyst Thomas Piliard. "Heyman is so concerned about protecting his meal ticket that he's alienating Lesnar by interfering with his competitive instincts."

Though locker room sources reported there was a great deal of yelling between Heyman and Lesnar after Undertaker announced he had jumped to *Smackdown*, Heyman insists there is no problem.

"Brock Lesnar is the most fantastic, gifted physical specimen in the world," he said. "For anyone to claim that either Brock or myself is attempting to duck any challenger is not only laughable, it's slanderous and irresponsible."

As of this writing, the ramifications of Stephanie's announcement regarding the undisputed title remained unclear. If Vince McMahon allows Steph's *Smackdown* decree to stand, *Raw* GM Eric Bischoff may have little choice but to create a new championship for his show. Or, if there really is trouble between Lesnar and Heyman, he might be better off trying to convince Lesnar to spend some of his time on *Raw*, which he would be allowed to do as champion.

Long-time Portland promoter Don Owen died at the age of 90 on August 1. Owen created one of the first televised weekly wrestling programs, simply called *Portland Wrestling*, in 1954. Owen was one of the few regional promoters to survive WWE's national expansion, and *Portland Wrestling* continued to air until 1991. One of the keys to Owen's longevity was the personal relationship he forged with his wrestlers, and such stars as Roddy Piper had been outspoken in their support of Owen through the years, even after they moved on to bigger things. Owen promoted his final wrestling card in 1992.



Don Owen (shown in 1984 with son Barry) was one of the few regional promoters who didn't buckle when Vince McMahon took the WWF national in the 1980s. He continued to run in Portland until finally closing down in 1992. Owen died at the age of 90 in August.

over and dropped several weights on his head and back. Fortunately, Valbowski suffered only minor contusions and was expected to miss only a few weeks.

Time for yet another **Bill Goldberg** update: "Da Man" was scheduled to make his in-ring return against **Satoshi Kojima** at Budokan Hall in late-August. Goldberg also recently hinted on his Web site that he might be scheduling a meeting with Vince McMahon soon. At this point, Goldberg's been off TV so long that the reaction to his

debut might not be so much "Who's Next?" as "Who's That?" In news from another very famous bald ex-champion who's been out of the limelight lately, **Steve Austin** has filed for divorce from

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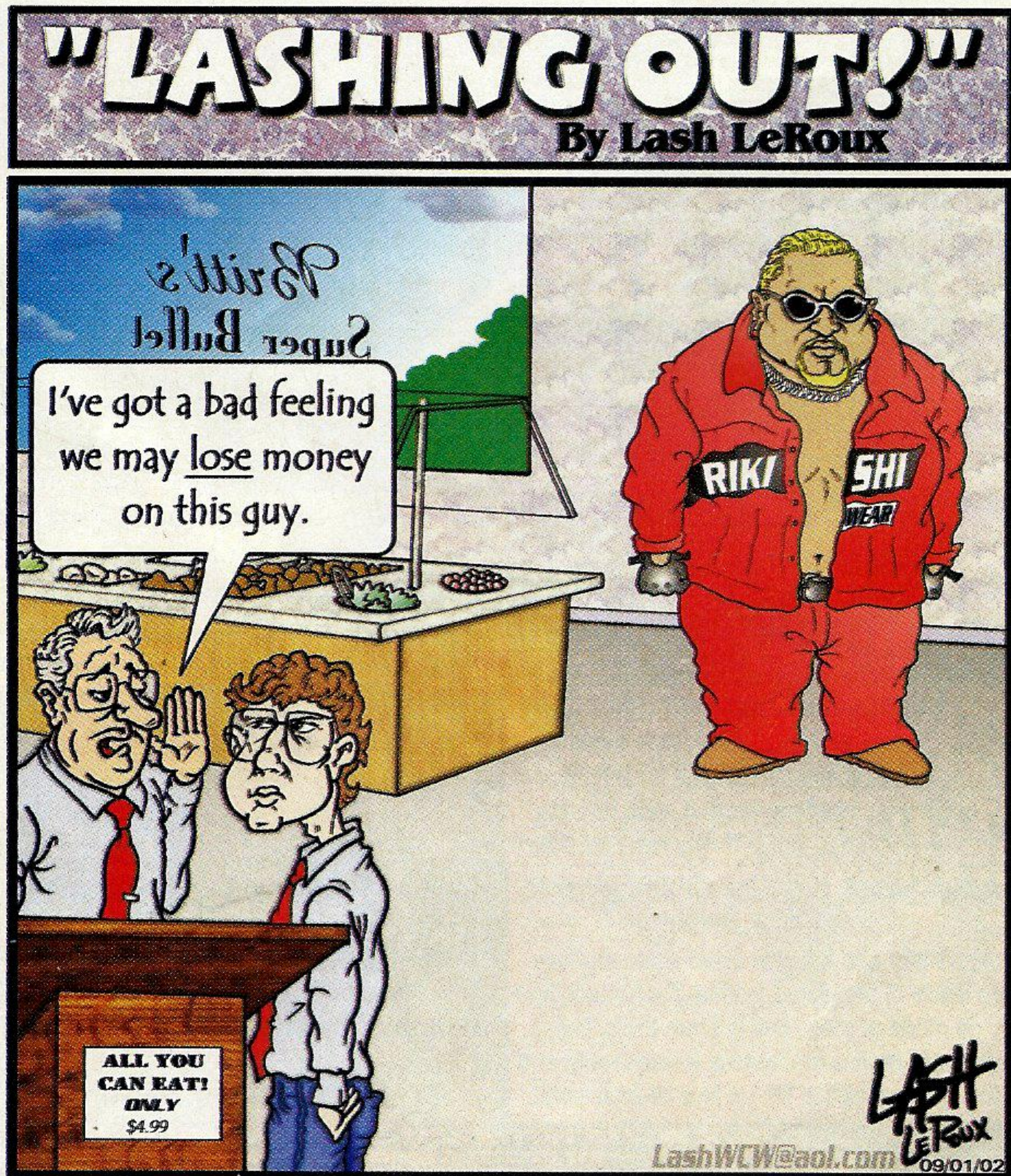
Less than two months after he walked out of WWE and was involved in a domestic incident with wife Debra, Steve Austin filed for divorce in Texas. Whether this latest development in the strange Austin saga will have any effect on his wrestling career remains to be seen.

In the most gruesome story in recent memory, California-based indy competitor **The Messiah** had his thumb cut off by two assailants who savagely attacked him and smashed a fish tank over his head in his home. According to published reports, police believe the attack might have been wrestling-related and were conducting an investigation.

Jerry Lynn captured the NWA-TNA X division title in a thrilling three-way ladder match also involving the two previous champions, **A.J. Styles** and **Low-Ki**, in August. The X division has become the hottest new division in wrestling, and the former ECW headliner and WWE light heavyweight champion is the division's highest-profile champion to date. Perhaps **Sean Waltman** (a.k.a. **X-Pac**), who was released by WWE in August, will renew his old rivalry with fellow Minnesota native Lynn in the near future.

I might be in the minority with this opinion, but I thought the unification of the hardcore title and the Intercontinental title was a bad move. While it's true that hardcore matches were becoming tired and passe, the decision eliminates yet another title for mid-card wrestlers to shoot for in preparation for a run at the I-C championship. In the past year, we've said goodbye to the WCW World, U.S., and tag titles, as well as the hardcore and European titles.

The Big Valbowski was injured in a bizarre, yet frightening incident while training. Valbowski was working out in a gym when a nearby weight rack tipped

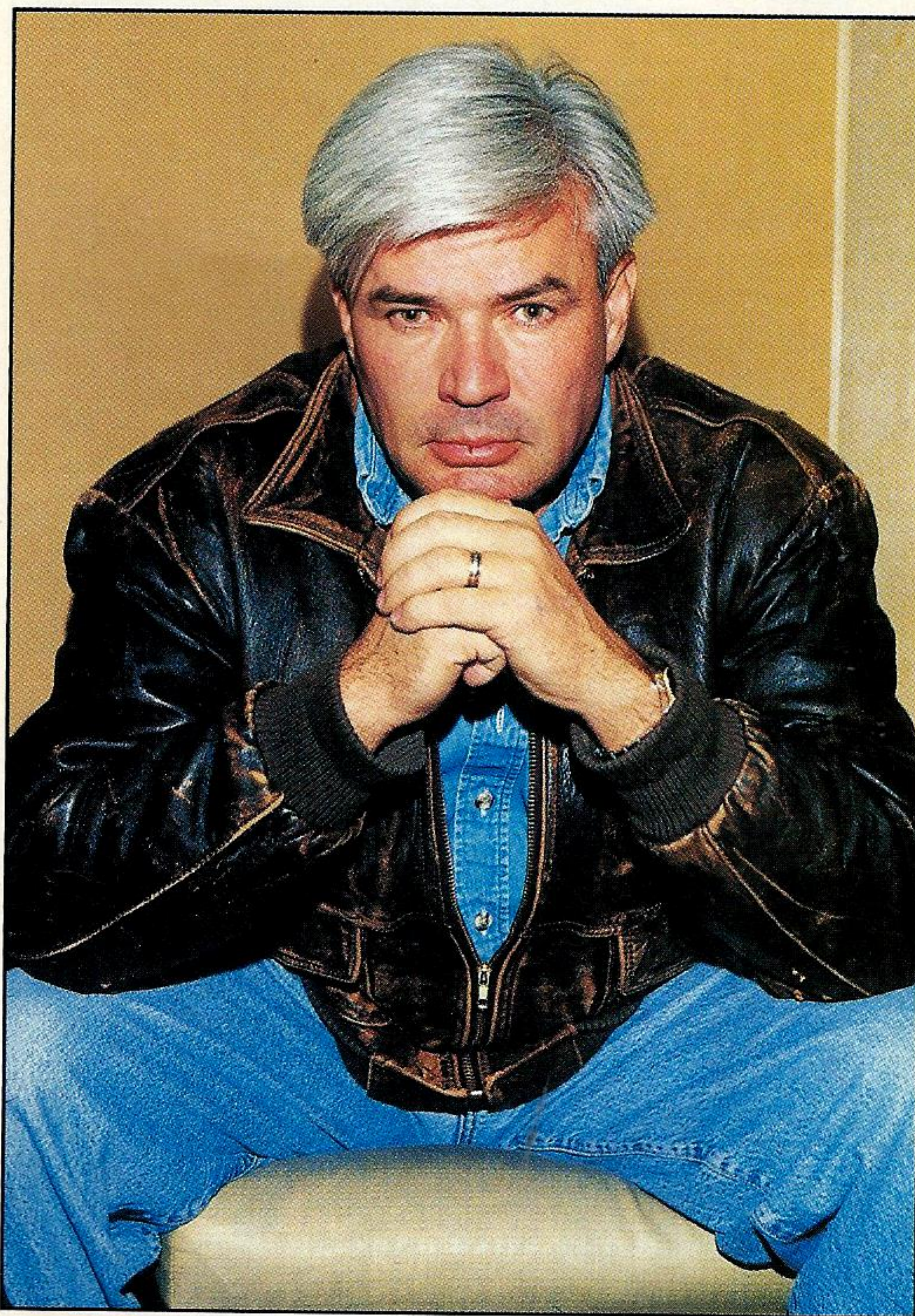


no holds barred

With Will Welsh

“WHAT A [EXPLETIVE] business, huh?” That was Paul Heyman’s reaction to the stunning announcement that Vince McMahon had officially named former WCW President Eric Bischoff the general manager of *Raw*.

Heyman’s comment to *wwe.com* is apropos, and no armada of writers could have come up with something so disturbingly eloquent. I imagine that on July 15, 2002, hell froze over, pigs flew, cats barked, dogs purred, pork chops grew on palm trees in Tel Aviv, and Jim Hellwig actually made a lick of sense.



There’s no question that Vince McMahon was feeling a little desperate, like he needed to do something very big to give his company a much-needed boost, when he signed Eric Bischoff to be the GM of *Raw*. It might be a move that provides both men with some redemption.

Why? Because on that day, two arch-enemies sold their souls to each other, and they sealed the deal with a shocking embrace on national television.

By hiring Bischoff, McMahon sold his soul to the man who tried to run him and his company out of business (and almost succeeded). Bischoff, by letting McMahon hire him, sold his soul to a man he once considered his inferior.

The odd thing is, in selling their souls, both men took a giant leap toward what they hope will be their individual redemptions.

“I’ve saved and invested my money well, so [signing with WWE is] not a financial issue for me,” Bischoff told me in an interview in early-2002, many months before he would actually debut for the company. “But it would be satisfying to get involved with something again that had a major impact on the industry. I did that once, and it was fun. It was very rewarding and fulfilling. The opportunity to do that again would be very interesting for me.”

Interesting? You betcha. Working for a man you once wanted to put in the poor house would have to be intriguing as hell, if not downright nerve-racking. Bischoff, though, isn’t back in wrestling because it’s interesting or it’s fun. That’s a bunch of hogwash. Bischoff is back because his legacy, as it stands today, will not be a particularly good one, and he wants to rescue it. He wants vindication.

Bischoff might have catapulted WCW and wrestling to previously unheard of heights in the mid-1990s, but that success hasn’t kept fans from regarding him as “ATM Eric,” the promoter who couldn’t keep the most well-funded wrestling organization in the history of the sport from losing millions upon millions upon millions of dollars.

Bischoff is one of the proudest men I’ve ever met. He doesn’t want to be remembered for WCW’s failures. He wants to be remembered as a success. A triumphant, effective run in WWE would go a long way toward that goal.

Now on to McMahon, Bischoff’s new boss. Wrestling’s greatest promoter is reeling. He’s taken blow (the XFL) after blow (the WCW invasion) after blow (“Stone-Cold” Steve Austin walking out) after blow (Kevin Nash’s quadriceps tear that effectively killed the New World Order), and now he’s like a beaten, punch-drunk boxer sitting on his stool before the final round of a championship fight. He’s so far behind on points that winning the round won’t

(Continued on page 80)

blindsided

By Harry Burkett

CHANTS OF "WELCOME back! Welcome back!" reverberated throughout Michael's Eighth Avenue as Reckless Youth took a quick bow for the Maryland Championship Wrestling fans. While Reckless had made occasional appearances in the town of Glen Burnie, located just outside of Baltimore, he never considered it his home turf. But now, as Reckless prepared to face Danny Carney of *Tough Enough 2* in a qualifying match for the Shane Shamrock Memorial Cup, Glen Burnie seemed as good a place for a homecoming as anywhere else.

"I honestly thought that I'd be forgotten after such a long time away from the ring," remarked Reckless. "There are so many wrestlers on the independent circuit that I would have felt lucky if anyone recognized me at all. That's why those chants, especially from MCW fans, were so moving. I appreciated it very much."

Reckless Youth was the hottest indy wrestler of the late-1990s, with success comparable to what Christopher Daniels is enjoying today. In 1998, he became the first and only American indy wrestler to crack the top 50 of the "PWI 500." Like Daniels, he was equally adept at playing the hero and the heel. His fame and skills earned him a developmental deal with the WWF, which seemed like a ticket to stardom. Instead, it was a one-way ticket to Memphis, the WWF's primary developmental territory at the time. Reckless toiled in obscurity for a chance to compete in the WWF someday as he lost prominence on the indy circuit, which had initially brought him fame.

So Reckless returned to the indy scene. On October 7, 2001, he suffered an injury in the first round of NWA Florida's Super Junior Open. Reckless attempted an outside dive onto Jimmy Rave during that bout, but he landed on the arena floor instead ... hard. He tore a disk in his lower back. He went on to defeat Rave, but lost in the following three-way match also involving Daniels and Scoot Andrews.

"It was painful enough that I thought I'd never wrestle again," he commented. "As a matter of fact, two doctors told me that I'd probably never wrestle again. It was very uncertain for a while."

If the comeback were to happen, Reckless knew it would be a long road back. It took a long time for the swelling to subside enough to allow him to begin physical therapy. Reckless underwent many stretching exercises to strengthen his lower back and abdominal region. "I still work through quite a bit of pain on a regular basis," he said. "The injury kept me sidelined for eight months."

On May 31 of this year, Reckless eased back into

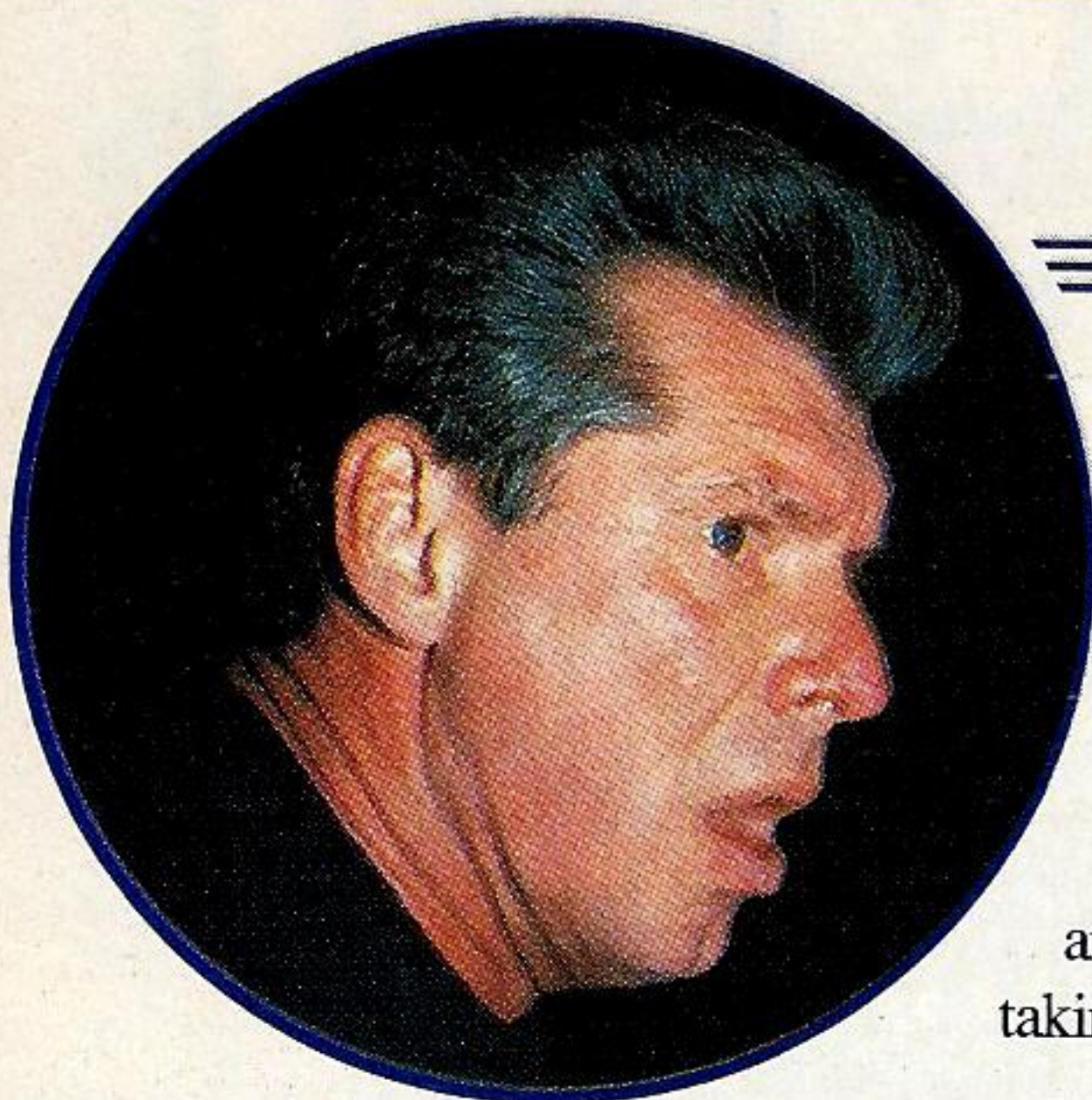
competition by teaming with his fellow members of The Black T-Shirt Squad, Mike Quackenbush and Don Montoya, in a six-man match against Midwest stars Colt Cabana, Chris Hero, and C.M. Punk at a Chikara show in Allentown, Pennsylvania. After 35 minutes of action, he planted Cabana with the Northern lights 2K1, a variation of the brainbuster, for the win.

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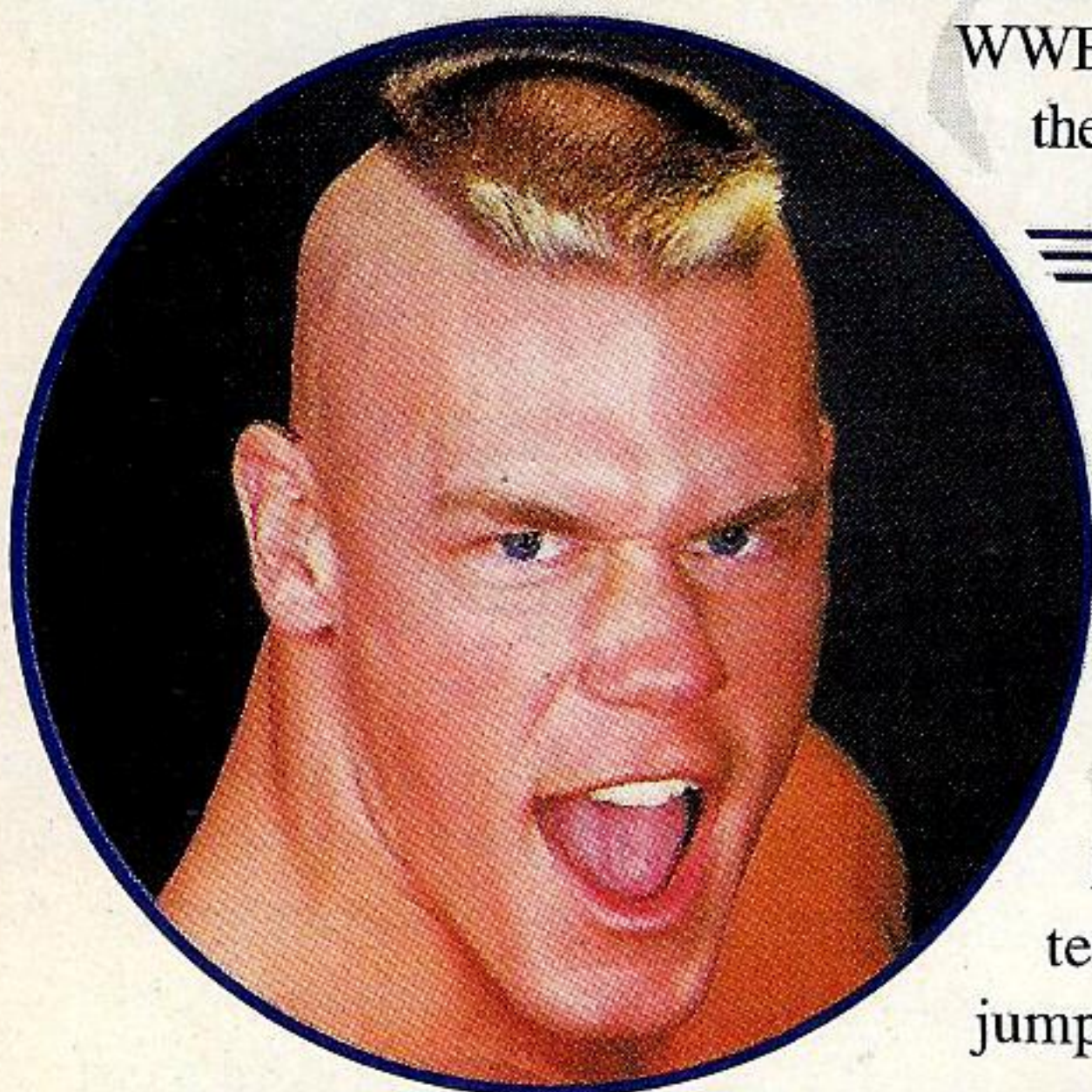
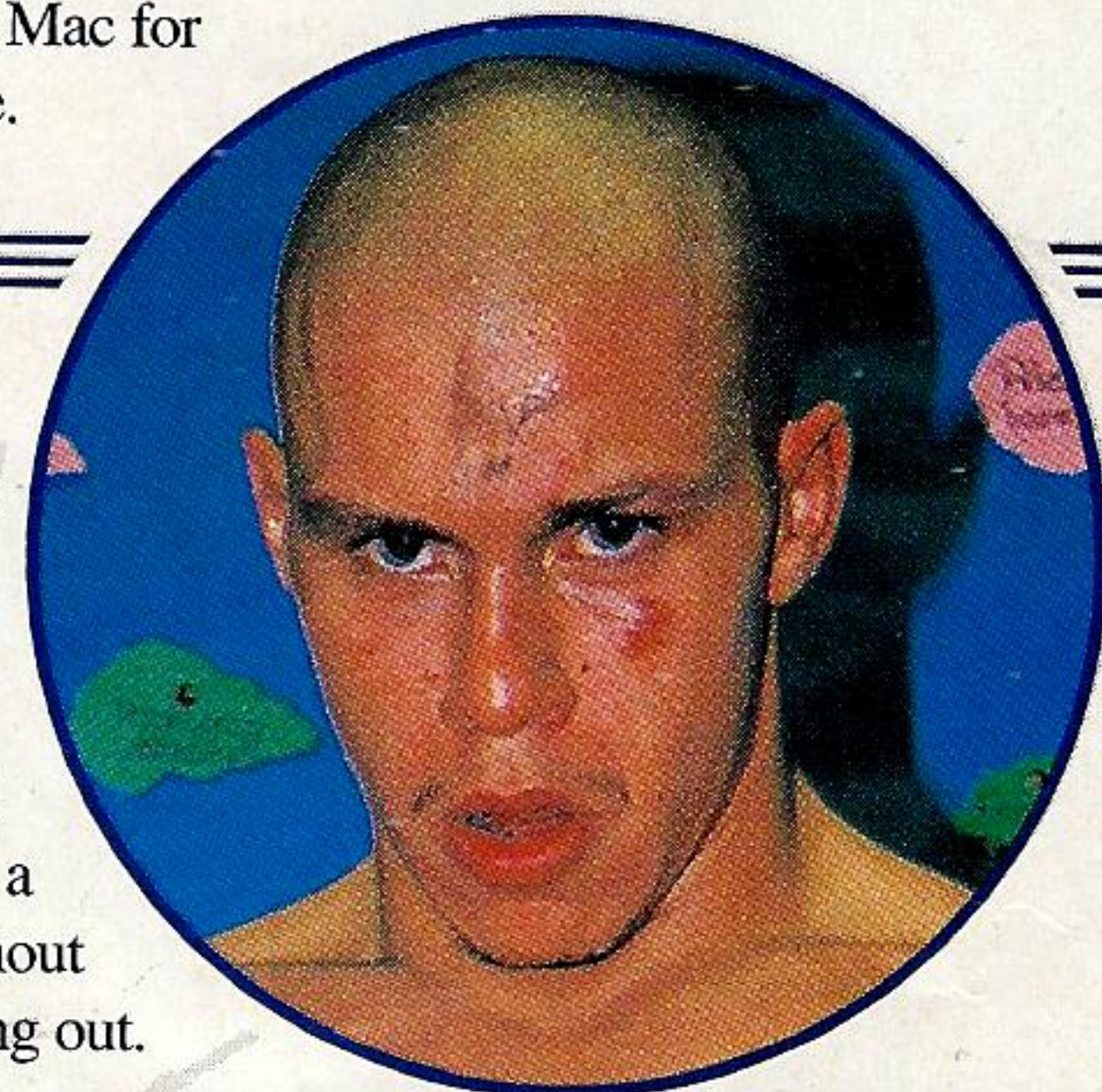
All the training and instruction he received while he was on *Tough Enough 2* wasn't enough to get Danny Carney past Reckless Youth in their qualifying match for the 2002 Shane Shamrock Memorial Cup. Reckless Youth won convincingly, then went on to triumph in the six-way elimination match for the Cup. Pretty impressive for a man who thought his career might be over last fall.

thumbs up



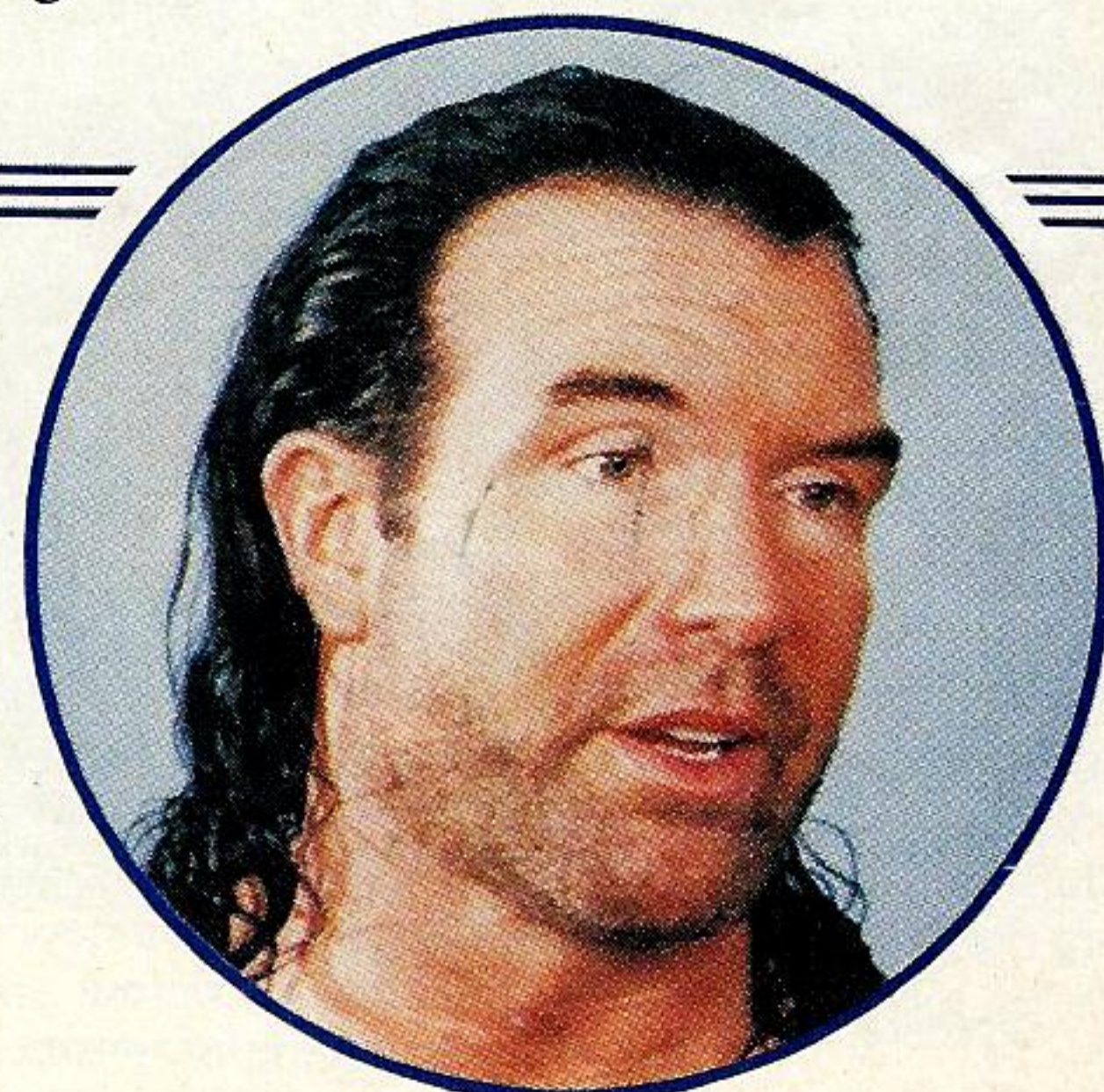
Thumbs Up to Vince McMahon. It took a while for the WWE chairman to figure out that a sense of competition was needed between *Raw* and *Smackdown* to make the brand extension work (or at least to give it a chance of working), but when he did figure it out, did he ever go for it. Within the first few weeks of Vinnie Mac's bitter long-time rival Eric Bischoff taking charge of *Raw* and his own daughter, Stephanie, taking charge of *Smackdown* as the respective general managers, WWE was reinvigorated. It may not be the real Monday night wars, but it finally feels like each and every show matters again. Kudos to Vinnie Mac for taking the chance and making an important change.

Thumbs Up to Low-Ki. In today's wrestling marketplace, there's seemingly only one path to stardom in the United States, and that path leads you directly to WWE's front door. Low-Ki is bucking that trend. By wrestling a hard-hitting, stiff Japanese style that leaves plenty of fans breathless, Low-Ki is gathering a lot of momentum as one of the sport's top five or 10 must-see performers. The NWA-TNA and Ring of Honor (of which which Low-Ki is the first champion) promotions should be thankful that a wrestler with such star potential is not signed to a WWE contract. The man wrestles in indies throughout the country as well and is definitely worth checking out.

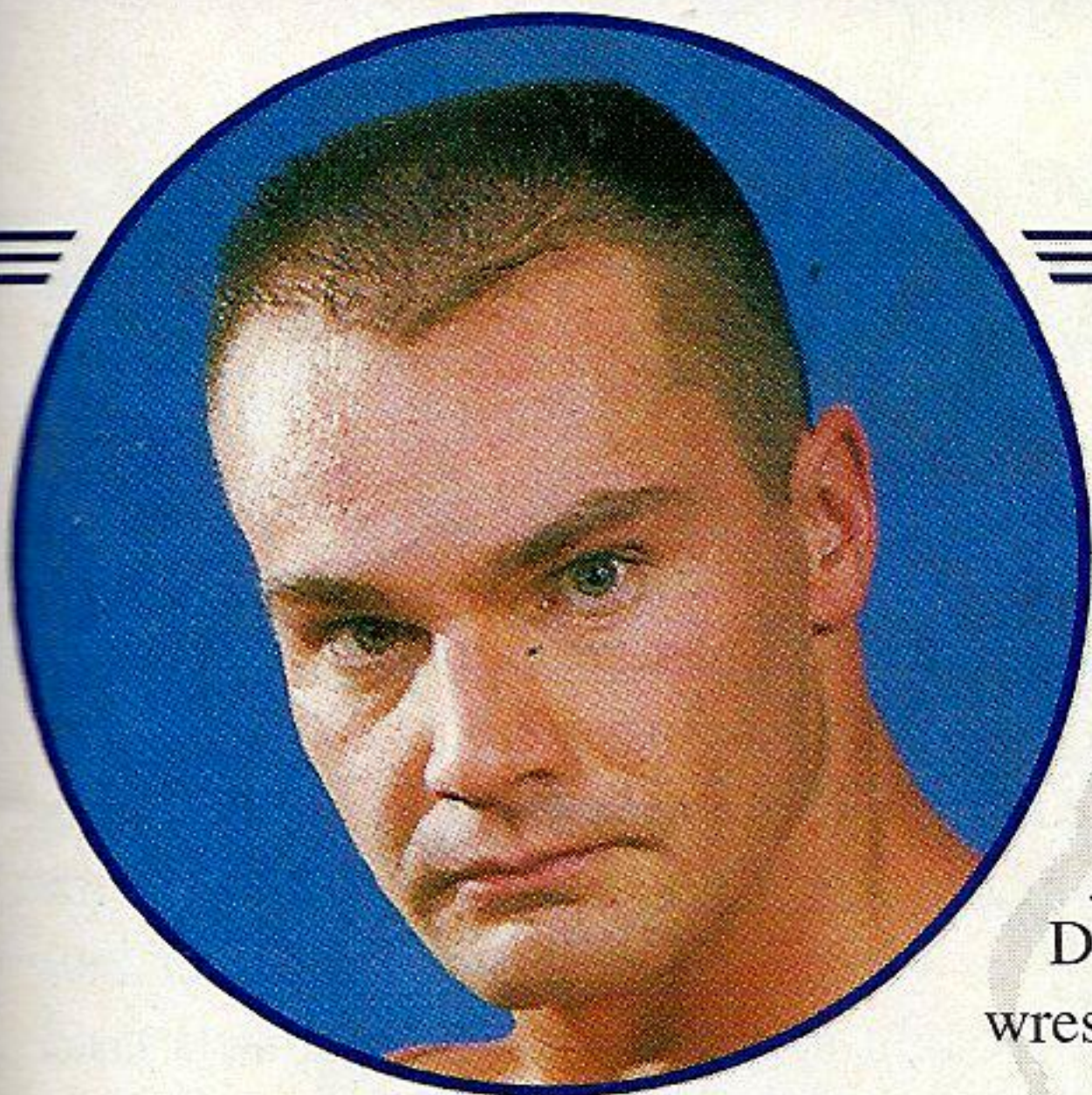


Thumbs Up to John Cena. While Brock Lesnar, WWE's "Next Big Thing," amasses a questionable but impressive win-loss record with the help of the devious Paul Heyman, Cena is slowly and quietly making an argument for himself as the best WWE callup of the year. Cena isn't getting the monster push that Lesnar has gotten, but he is winning most of his matches cleanly, and he has looked pretty darn flawless in doing so. Sure, he's had some luck here and there and has a few losses on his record, but luck is a part of every match, no matter what anyone else says. Chris Jericho might have jumped to *Raw* just to avoid Cena altogether.

Thumbs Up to Scott Hall. When Hall was released from WWE because of more personal problems in the spring of 2002, most assumed that the former "Bad Guy's" career was all but over; life on the road had simply become too much for the former Outsider to handle. Thanks to NWA-TNA and its weekly shows, however, Hall is back on track and looking strong. He's wrestling like he's found his passion for the sport again, he is still getting great crowd reactions, and all the backstage reports indicate that he's been nothing but clean and sober. We hope the trend continues. We're pulling for him.

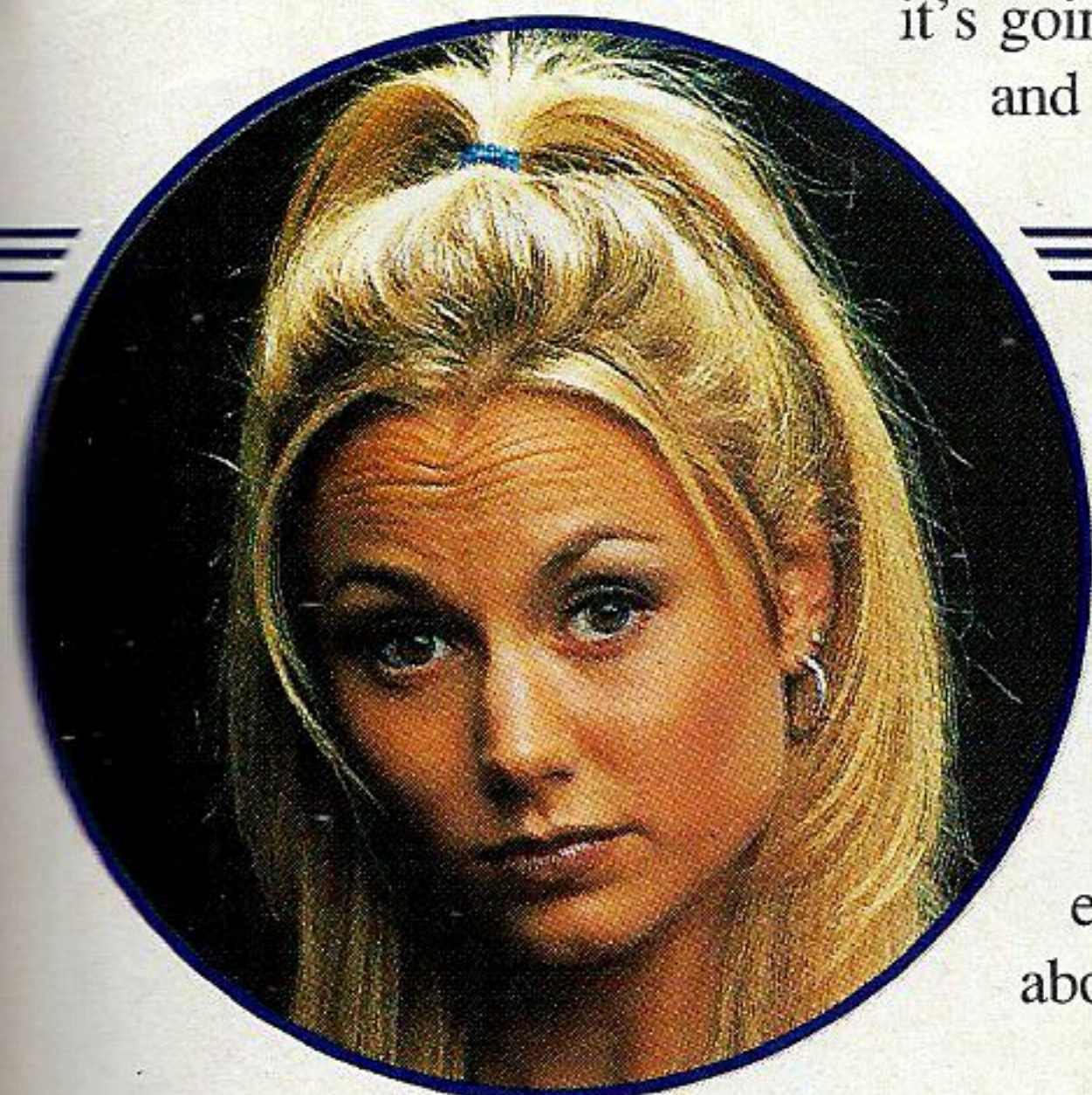
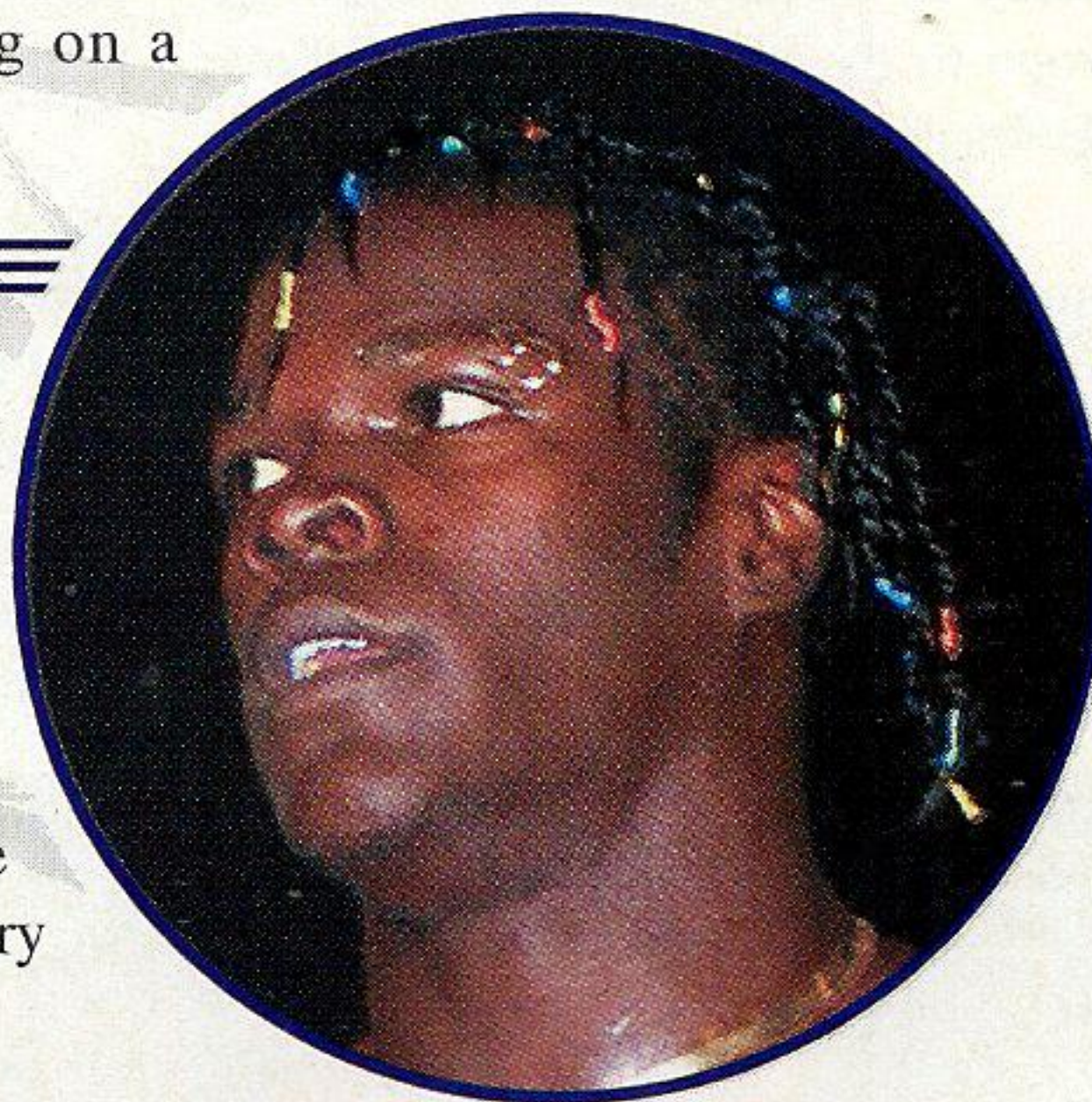


thumbs down



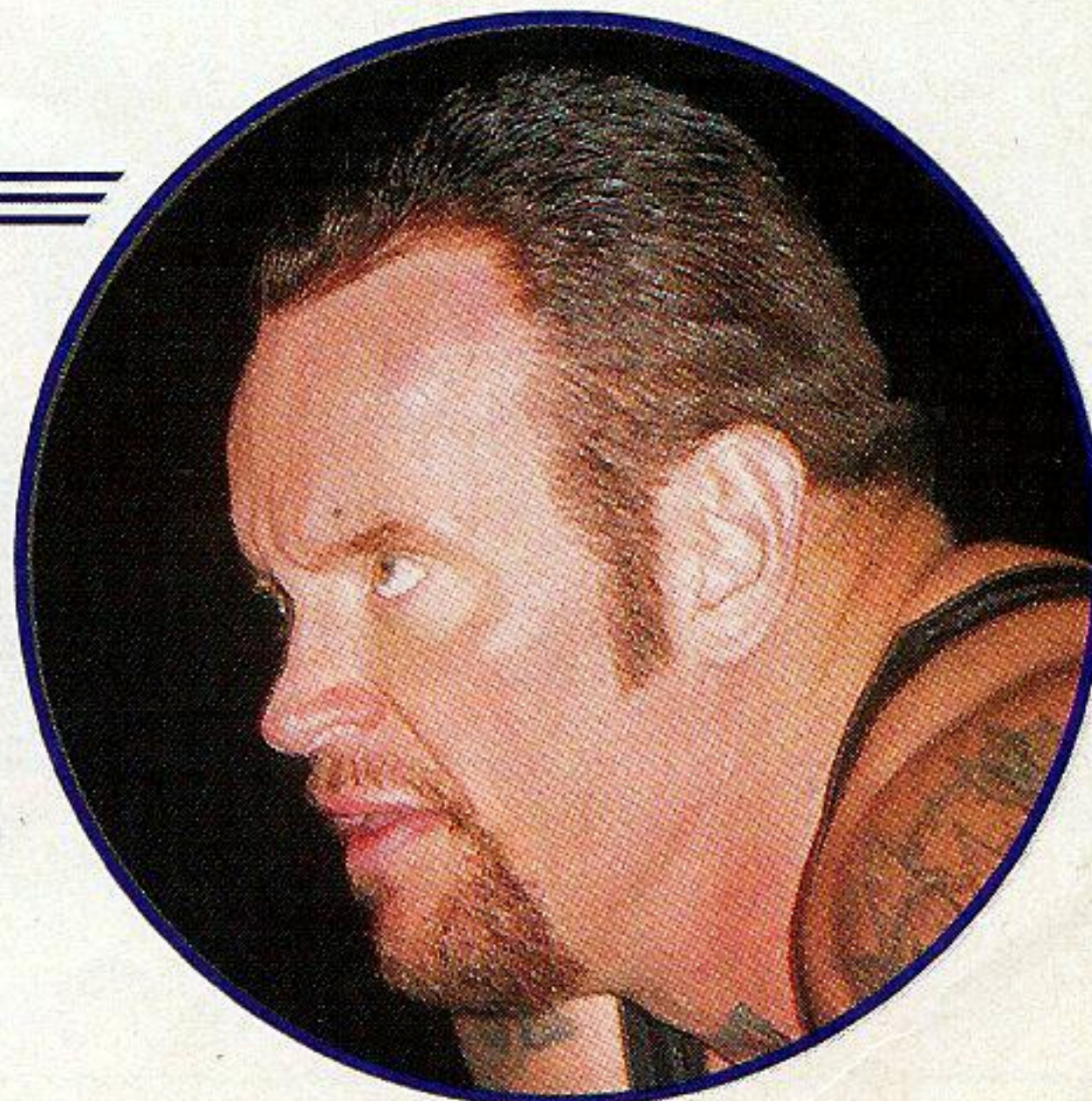
Thumbs Down to Lance Storm. Thumbs down to those other two wretched Un-Americans, Christian and Test, too. We realize that it's getting increasingly difficult to make a name for yourself in a crowded WWE these days, but that doesn't mean that wrestlers should start spouting off anti-American propaganda. Does it work? Of course it does. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, any wrestler espousing anti-American views is going to be booed lustily. We just wonder if the cheap heat is really worth it, though. Does this kind of rhetoric really belong on a wrestling show?

Thumbs Down to The Truth. He may be the biggest surprise of the NWA-TNA heavyweight division, but it's ironic that the former K-Krush/K-Kwik has changed his name to The Truth, because there's nothing truthful about him at all. In playing the race card, he tells lie after lie after lie. How did the establishment in NWA-TNA hold him down, anyway? By signing him to a contract and putting him on TV for the entire world to see? Come on. We wish that Truth would change his ways, because he's extremely talented, but that doesn't look like it's going to happen. It's as if he enjoys being angry and bitter toward the world.



Thumbs Down to Stacy Keibler. Everyone's favorite leggy blonde keeps on disappointing us. As soon as Stephanie McMahon took over *Smackdown* as its general manager and Vince McMahon gave up much of his control of that brand, Keibler began looking for a way to remain in a behind-the-scenes power position. Helping new *Raw* GM Eric Bischoff put one over on Stephanie did just that. (Does this girl even think about trying to do something positive with her WWE career?) It'll be interesting to watch this relationship play out. They're both about as trustworthy as your average snake.

Thumbs Down to The Undertaker. The Undertaker was a proud undisputed WWE World heavyweight champion for two full months this year. He was also an underhanded son of a gun while holding that belt, and we didn't like him one bit. Recently, however, 'Taker's shown a new, compassionate side of his personality, specifically in his dealings with Jeff Hardy. Too bad it hasn't come out all that often. "Big Evil" needs to make up his mind, because he can't have it both ways. People will cheer him, but only if he truly wants them to—and he's going to have to prove that's exactly what he wants.



correspondents reports

Uniondale, NY WWE SummerSlam Correspondent: Ron Fleming

Shawn Michaels said he came to SummerSlam to fight, not wrestle, and "The Heartbreak Kid" looked the part as he entered the ring wearing jeans and cowboy boots. Michaels attacked his former best friend, Triple-H, before the opening bell of their non-sanctioned match. Michaels, whose in-ring career seemingly ended four years earlier due to back injuries, shocked the crowd early by leapfrogging Triple-H and throwing him over the top rope to the arena floor. He followed that with a plancha onto Helmsley at ringside.

The old HBK seemed to be back until Triple-H ducked a superkick and caught Michaels in an over-the-knee backbreaker. Then he executed another backbreaker. "The Cerebral Assassin" used the old-school move to devastating effectiveness, leaving the three-time former World heavyweight champion writhing in pain, and most in attendance uncertain of how much longer he'd be able to continue. He

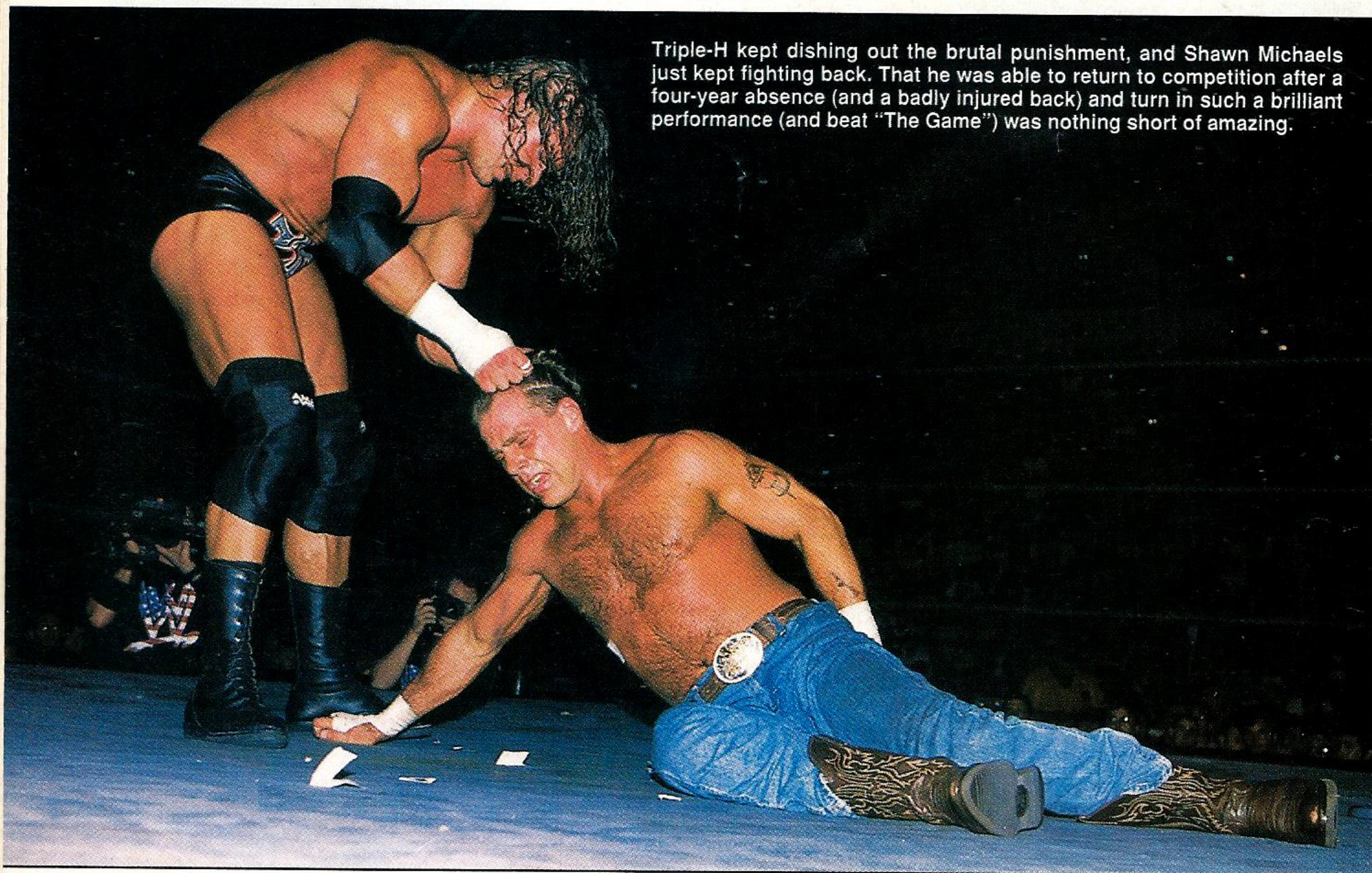
then whipped Michaels into the corner turnbuckles twice.

Triple-H continued his methodical attack by stretching Michaels' back in an abdominal stretch. Helmsley slammed Michaels' back into a steel chair he had placed in the middle of the ring, but Michaels escaped three pin attempts. Then came a sidewalk slam onto the chair. Michaels showed why Vince McMahon once touted him as "the most resilient superstar in the WWF" by kicking out of three *more* pin attempts.

Frustrated, "The Game" grabbed a chair, but Michaels switched the momentum by superkicking the chair into Helmsley's face. That was when Michaels pulled a ladder into the ring, and Triple-H brought in the ring steps. Michaels used both of those weapons to his advantage.

Next, Michaels hit Triple-H with a fire extinguisher and pushed him on top of a table inside the ring. He climbed to the top turnbuckle and dived on top of Triple-H, breaking the table in half. Triple-H came back and dodged a superkick and went for the pedigree, but Michaels maneuvered

(Continued on page 84)



Triple-H kept dishing out the brutal punishment, and Shawn Michaels just kept fighting back. That he was able to return to competition after a four-year absence (and a badly injured back) and turn in such a brilliant performance (and beat "The Game") was nothing short of amazing.

LESNAR OR CENA? LESNAR WILL BE THE BIGGER LONG-TERM STAR

By Frank Krewda

THERE ARE MANY reasons why Brock Lesnar will become and remain a bigger long-term WWE superstar than John Cena. Foremost: WWE has already demonstrated its commitment to pushing Lesnar through its calculated approach to his development.

I don't buy the argument that Lesnar has been pushed too hard too fast. From the minute he first appeared on *Raw*, it was clear Vince McMahon had a plan to groom him into a long-term WWE performer. WWE carefully parceled the amount of air time Lesnar received by having him do run-ins at first. Then, only after Lesnar demonstrated his skills, did WWE allow him to advance to the next level—wrestling full matches.

The company also teamed Lesnar with Paul Heyman, a legitimate industry veteran capable of cultivating a long-lasting image. Another manifestation of WWE's caution with Lesnar is his limited mike time. Let's face it: McMahon knows he may very well have wrestling's "Next Big Thing" in Lesnar and is doing all he can to guard against overexposure. That can only mean he's prepping Brock for a long, productive career in WWE.

Of course, that doesn't mean Lesnar lacks the skills to advance right now. After all, he was just a few months into his WWE career when the decision-makers deemed him ready to make his impact felt at a major event—King of the Ring. Two months after he won that tournament, Lesnar was poised to meet The Rock at SummerSlam—WWE's second-biggest pay-per-view of the year—

where most were quick to predict he'd defeat The Rock for the WWE World title.

John Cena may possess the same physical ability. However, the WWE creative team hasn't handled him quite as carefully so far. Sure, they've hotshotted Cena with near-wins against Kurt Angle and a clean pinfall victory over Chris Jericho at *Vengeance*. But we all have seen upshots like Cena make an early impact, then flame out before. What evidence is there to suggest Cena will be different?

Admittedly, I, too, have been impressed by Cena's early showings against the superstars listed above. And like Lesnar, he had a strong run in Ohio Valley Wrestling before he arrived at the big dance. And having The Undertaker endorse his career is a good sign. But aside from his poise and intensity, Cena hasn't demonstrated any distinguishing characteristics so far.

Lesnar, on the other hand, has superstar stamped all over his massive frame. He clearly has the same "it" factor that made so many people



One long look at Brock Lesnar is all you need to take to figure out that Brock Lesnar has a chance to be a huge star in this business for a long time, according to Frank Krewda. He doesn't believe he has been pushed too hard and too fast.

stand up and notice The Rock, Bill Goldberg, and others. Cena, as gutsy and endearing as he is, does not appear to have that aura—not yet anyway.

Maybe that's why WWE is trying to get as much mileage out of Cena as possible right away. Who knows where he'll be two years from now.

Frank Krewda is a senior writer for *THE WRESTLER*.

counterpoint:

LESNAR OR CENA? CENA WILL BE THE BIGGER LONG-TERM STAR

By Will Welsh

IT'S FUNNY HOW people always seem to mention Bill Goldberg whenever they talk or write about Brock Lesnar. That might be because when people look closely at Lesnar, they recognize he's very similar to "Da Man"—only minus the personality.

Vince McMahon, in his infinite wisdom, might be proceeding with caution, but he's also pigeonholed Lesnar into the silent-but-dangerous monster role. True, Goldberg rode that role to megastardom in WCW, but the very same role eventually landed him on very hard times, character-wise at least.

Why? Because the fans grew bored with the same old spear/jackhammer, squash. And when he was finally forced to venture outside his comfort zone, Goldberg proved to be a slightly above-average talent. The fans have already taken to chanting Goldberg's name when Lesnar enters the ring. That's not a good sign.

And like Goldberg, Lesnar is not being protected from overexposure—he's being protected from himself. No doubt about it, Lesnar has the size and look to go far in the business. The only thing holding him back is his lack of versatility. What we've seen from Lesnar so far might be all we're going to get. How long will it be before the fans tire of Lesnar's brawling style and F5 finisher?

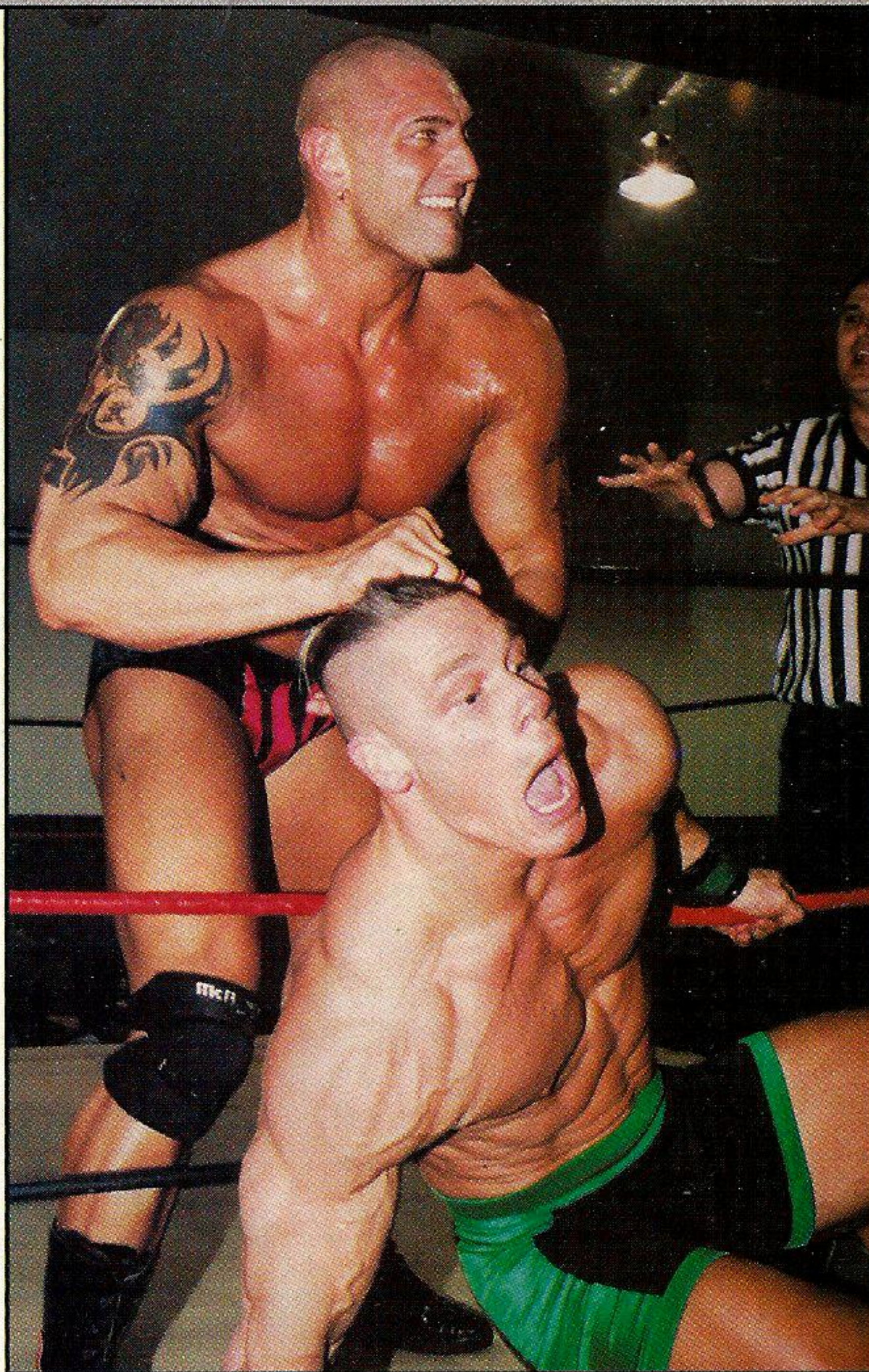
More importantly, how long will it be before Brock himself grows weary of his character? Paul Heyman can't serve as his mouthpiece forever. And once the physically demanding style he works begins to take its toll on his

body, as it most likely will, Lesnar will be forced to change his in-ring approach. Given his size and strength, Brock might not be suited for much else in WWE.

John Cena, by contrast, is a much more versatile wrestler. He's already proven that he's capable of working well with a wide range of opponents. Those who have seen his matches against Angle and Jericho can attest to his adaptability.

Plus, the few promos he's been involved with in WWE have already shown that Cena is much more comfortable in front of the camera than Lesnar is (and he showed even more verbal skill in OVW). His interplay with Angle and Jericho demonstrated Cena's gift of gab. In today's wrestling climate, which places just as much emphasis on entertainment as pure athletic ability, Cena's skills should carry him much farther than Lesnar.

Had Lesnar burst upon the scene in the early-1980s, there'd be no ceiling on his career, but in wrestling's present state, which demands all-



John Cena didn't skyrocket to the top of OVW when he got there and hasn't skyrocketed to the top of WWE. That's a good thing, writes Will Welsh. He is of the opinion that Cena has already shown a lot more versatility than Lesnar and thinks people will enjoy watching his slower climb to the top of WWE.

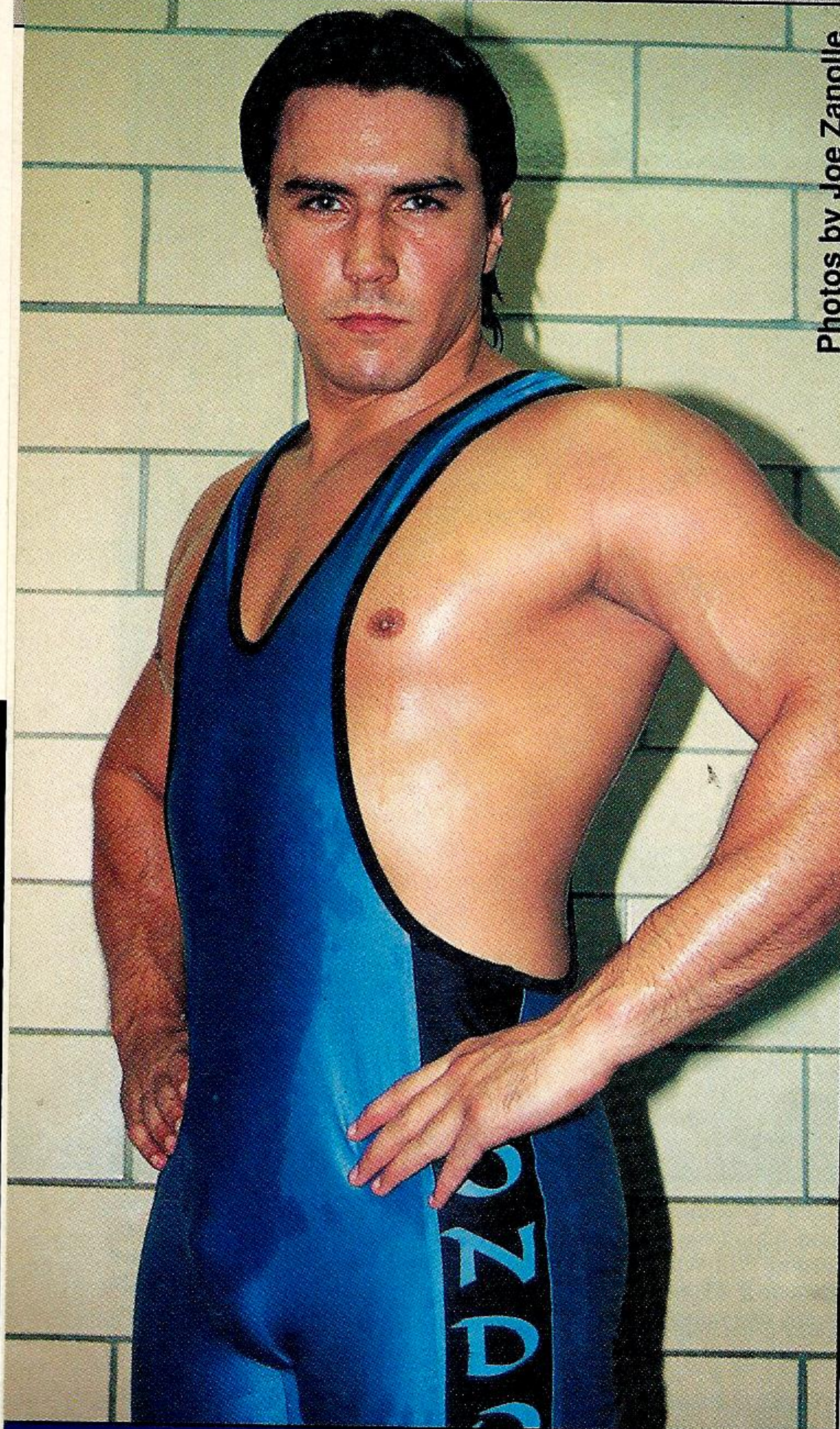
around performance from its superstars in the ring and out, Cena offers the fans and WWE more. It will take him longer to get to the top than Lesnar, but we'll all enjoy watching him make the climb, and once gets there, he'll be around longer than Brock.

Will Welsh is a senior writer for THE WRESTLER.

introducing:

By Harry Burkett

PAUL LONDON



Photos by Joe Zanolle

This Ring of Honor star is best known for his connection with Shawn Michaels, but Paul London's unusual journey began long before he started training in San Antonio

WHAT DO IVAN PUTSKI, Dory Funk Jr., and Shawn Michaels have in common? This is sure to be a mental stumper, because there probably isn't a broader range of individuals that represent so many facets of pro wrestling.

If you attend a Ring of Honor or Extreme Texas Wrestling show in the near future and happen to see a young man mixing forearm uppercuts with moonsaults and a Polish hammer or two, then you will wonder no more. While training to become a full-time wrestler, Paul London was directly influenced by each of those stars.

London has taken on the daunting task of attending college while pursuing his wrestling career. In fact, London's choice of universities has been dictated by the quality of training schools nearby. That hasn't always worked out very well.

"I moved from my hometown of Austin, Texas, to attend Duquesne University just because Shane Douglas and Dominic DeNucci's ECW House of Hardcore II was located in the area," explained London. "That turned out to be a mistake. Just before classes were supposed to start, Douglas tore his biceps while in WCW. The classes were canceled. So there I was in Pittsburgh, feeling as if I had no reason to be there."

That didn't prevent London from making the same mistake twice. Next, he enrolled at the University of Memphis so he could train with local wrestlers in hopes of starting his career in Power Pro Wrestling. Although the training seemed to be solid, he felt it was lacking the challenging dynamic that could make him a great wrestler. He returned to Austin within a couple of weeks.

He had reason to be depressed. But that lasted only until a friend called him and suggested he turn on the local television news. It featured a segment on Ivan Putski and his new training school, located right there in Austin.

London enrolled the following day, and he began train-

ing under Ivan and his son, Scott. At 5'10" and 201 pounds, London realized he wasn't going to learn the high-flying style—which would be necessary for his success—from a strongman like Ivan Putski. Nevertheless, he found "Polish Power" to be a hands-on teacher and a proponent of a harder, stiffer approach.

"I remember we were running spots, and another guy tapped me with a light Polish hammer," said London. "That's when Ivan ran in and just hammered the hell out of me. Believe me, Ivan is still physically fit and could still go in a match today."

Scott Putski thought of London's first gimmick. He adopted the name of Richard Royce and touted himself as the heir to "Rolls Royce Industries," complete with dollar signs on his wardrobe. In his debut on April 7, 2000, at the Austin City Coliseum, London, as Royce, pinned Air Bud, a wrestler named after the movie about the golden retriever.

Obviously, the Putskis favored the old WWF philosophy of character development.

After competing for the Putskis' Southwest Wrestling Federation, London ventured to Florida, where he learned mat grappling skills from Dory Funk Jr. and, occasionally, Dory's brother, Terry. Then London went to San Antonio and enrolled in Rudy Boy Gonzalez' Texas Wrestling Academy, an offshoot of the Shawn Michaels Wrestling Academy. Gonzalez was the primary trainer for Michaels' original school.

"Shawn Michaels came to the school to give us pointers, and he was very inspiring," recalled London. "And Rudy knows such a vast library of Lucha moves, many of which aren't used prominently in the States. For me, everything came together under Rudy's guidance."

Now using his real name, London has thrived in Gonzalez' Extreme Texas Wrestling. A major achievement from the past year was defeating Hobo Joe for the ETW TV title. London's personal highlights, however, were beating Christopher Daniels on both July 3 in San Antonio and July 4 in Harlingen.

"I considered that a great honor," commented the 22-year-old. "Before breaking into wrestling, I watched so many tapes of Chris Daniels and Curry Man (Daniels' character in Japan), and later had the opportunity to train with him in California. He's awesome."

London has also wrestled Juventud Guerrera to a double-disqualification and faced Rey Misterio Jr. just before the Luchador went to the Heartland Wrestling



Paul London executes a beautiful moonsault against another man who trained for a while under Shawn Michaels in Texas, Michael Shane. Michaels and Rudy Boy Gonzalez had a hand in training a lot of the up-and-coming stars in Philadelphia-based Ring of Honor, and London seems to have as much potential as any of them.

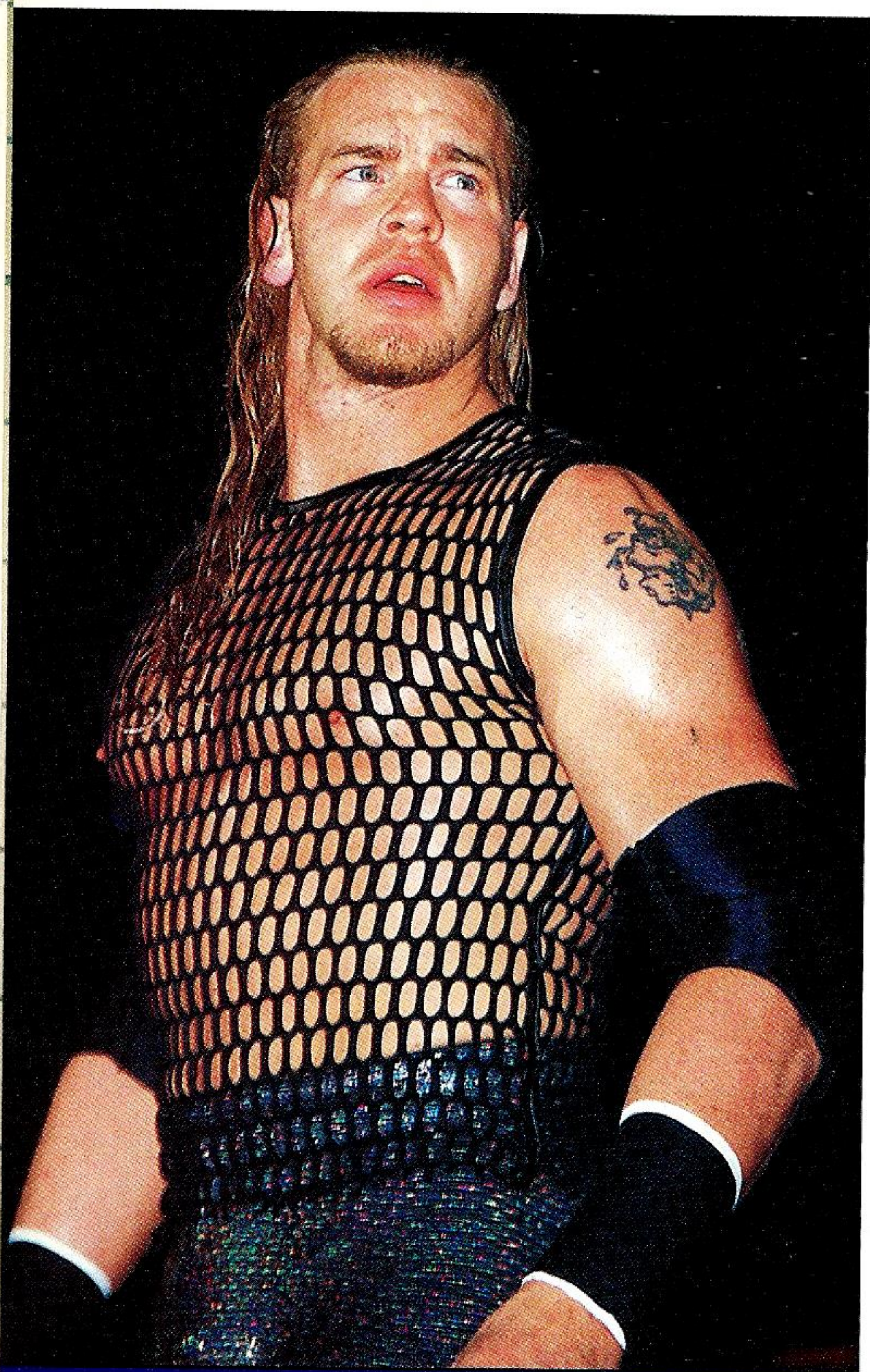
Association to prepare for his WWE debut. His match against Perry Saturn aired on *Jakked* and *Metal*. And remember when Ric Flair was "arrested" for punching that "fan" on *Smackdown*? That was London.

The recent buzz about London surrounds his efforts in Philadelphia-based Ring of Honor. There, he is feuding with other Shawn Michaels trainees, including American Dragon, Spanky, Michael Shane, and John Hope. Aside from his appearances in ROH and ETW, London is pursuing an acting career and attending Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos.

London says he isn't looking into universities in the Ohio Valley region ... yet. □

Q&A

CHRISTIAN



"When I saw Edge come out to the ring with Hulk Hogan and Hogan had 'Real American' blaring throughout the arena, I almost hurled. I was literally sick to my stomach. That's when I knew Edge was a lost cause."

IF THE RECENT course of Christian's career were a road map, even the most experienced travelers would find themselves going nowhere fast. The cocky Canadian first progressed from being Edge's witty and trusty partner to becoming one of WWE's all-time accomplished performers—a seven-time World tag team champ. Next, he solidified his reputation as a credible singles star with a decent run as Intercontinental champ.

Unfortunately, Christian's career has regressed steadily ever since. A run as European champ was soiled by frequent temper tantrums thrown whenever fans failed to lavish praise upon him or whenever something went wrong for him.

These days, Christian seems content to spend the majority of his time offending U.S. wrestling fans as a member of The Un-Americans, along with fellow Canucks Lance Storm and Test. Sure, he and Storm also happened to be the WWE World tag team champs at press time, but recent episodes of **Raw** clearly demonstrate that Christian's number-one priority is agitating American fans by exaggerating the ills and inconsistencies of anything red, white, and blue.

Despite this preoccupation with becoming the pre-eminent burr in pro wrestling's saddle, Christian remains one of wrestling's most exciting and talented superstars. Sooner or later, the level of competition in WWE will force him to focus more on his in-ring career—rather than the shenanigans that come along with it—and perhaps he'll assume a spot atop the sport that many believe is his for the taking. In the meantime, Christian's opponents (as well as millions of U.S. fans) will simply have to endure his smug persona and forced anti-American patriotism.

Senior Writer Frank Krewda caught up with Christian after a recent episode of **Raw** and coaxed the rising star into sharing his views about the fans, America, Edge, as well as other facets of his career.

Q: Much of the current buzz in wrestling centers on The Un-Americans, Christian. You, Lance Storm, and Test are all very talented wrestlers who are capable of doing great things in the sport—both together and individually. Why waste so much time and energy on such negativity?

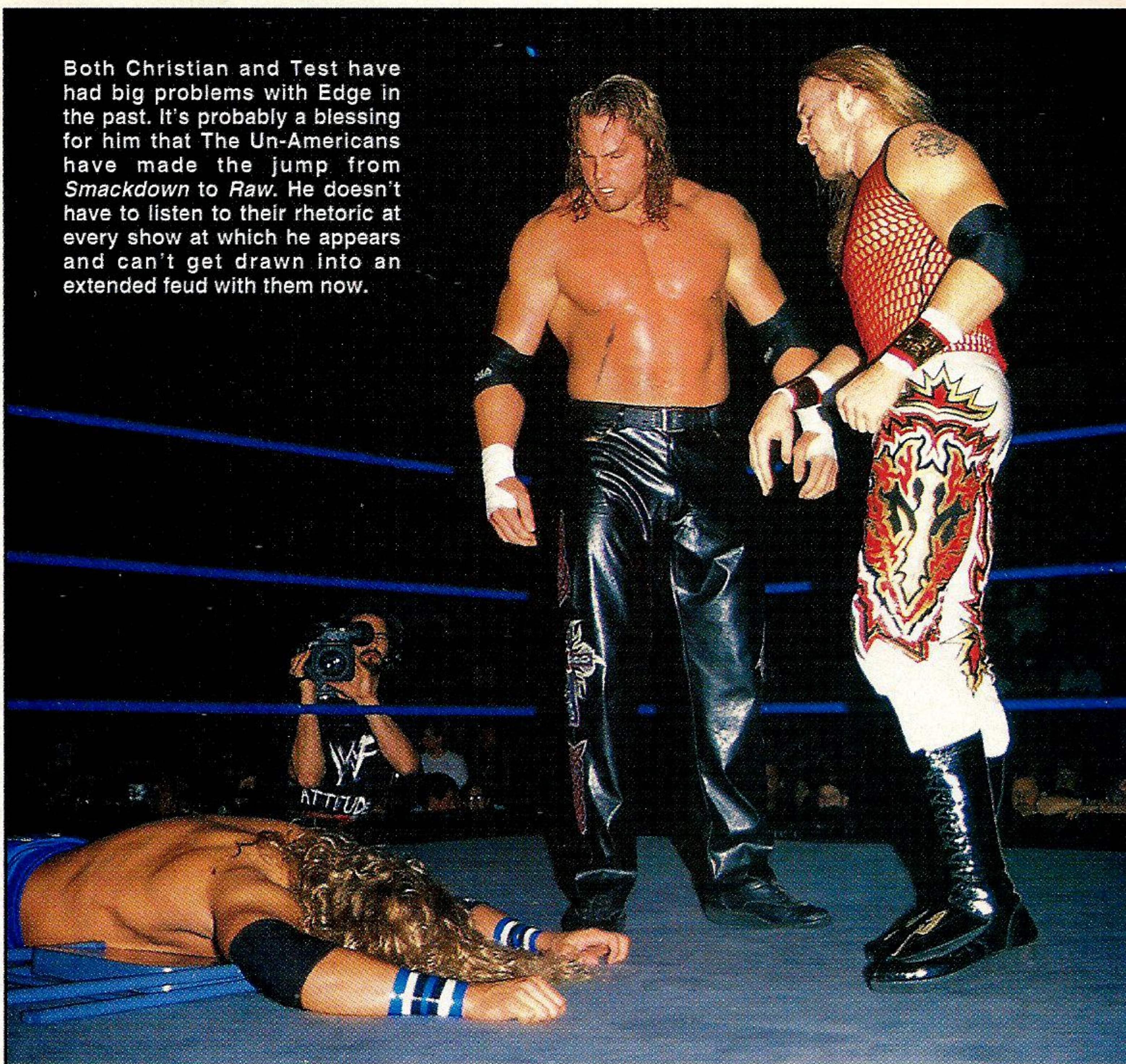
A: Somebody has to do it. Somebody has to expose all the lies and hypocrisy of the so-called

"American dream." Who better than three Canadian superstars who are being systematically squeezed out by WWE—the great American juggernaut—and by the American fans? Maybe holding up the mirror to American society will cause this country to think about how it treats its guests. We had to do something to get people to start showing us the proper respect.

Q: Systematically squeezed out? Sounds like a good old conspiracy theory to me. What evidence do you have to prove WWE and its fans are working against you and other Canadians?

A: Look at the welcome we get at arenas around the country. It reeks of hostility and bitterness. The fans try to make us feel like second-class citizens when all we're trying to do is go out and put on a good show. Look at the referees around here. How many fast counts did we get on us before we decided to stand up for ourselves and do something about it? How many times did a referee just happen to be looking the other way when we were getting screwed over by some American wrestler here in WWE? And what's worse, WWE does nothing to stop it or even discourage it. They just threw up their hands and said it was just another tough break or something like that. I think some of the boys in the back enjoy watching us get humiliated just as much as the fans do. That's why my current reign as tag team champ with Lance has been the sweetest one yet. By far the sweetest one. We get to

Both Christian and Test have had big problems with Edge in the past. It's probably a blessing for him that The Un-Americans have made the jump from *Smackdown* to *Raw*. He doesn't have to listen to their rhetoric at every show at which he appears and can't get drawn into an extended feud with them now.



laud our superiority over you stupid Americans every night. There's nothing like it.

Q: I find that hard to believe. I think you and Lance Storm are worthy champions, but everything you guys say and do seems based on spite. How can that be more satisfying than your first tag title, or the seventh title, when you and Edge set the WWE record for title wins?

A: Let's put it this way. My disdain for this country runs deeper than any nostalgic feelings I have for WWE or what's-his-name.

Q: What's *whose* name?

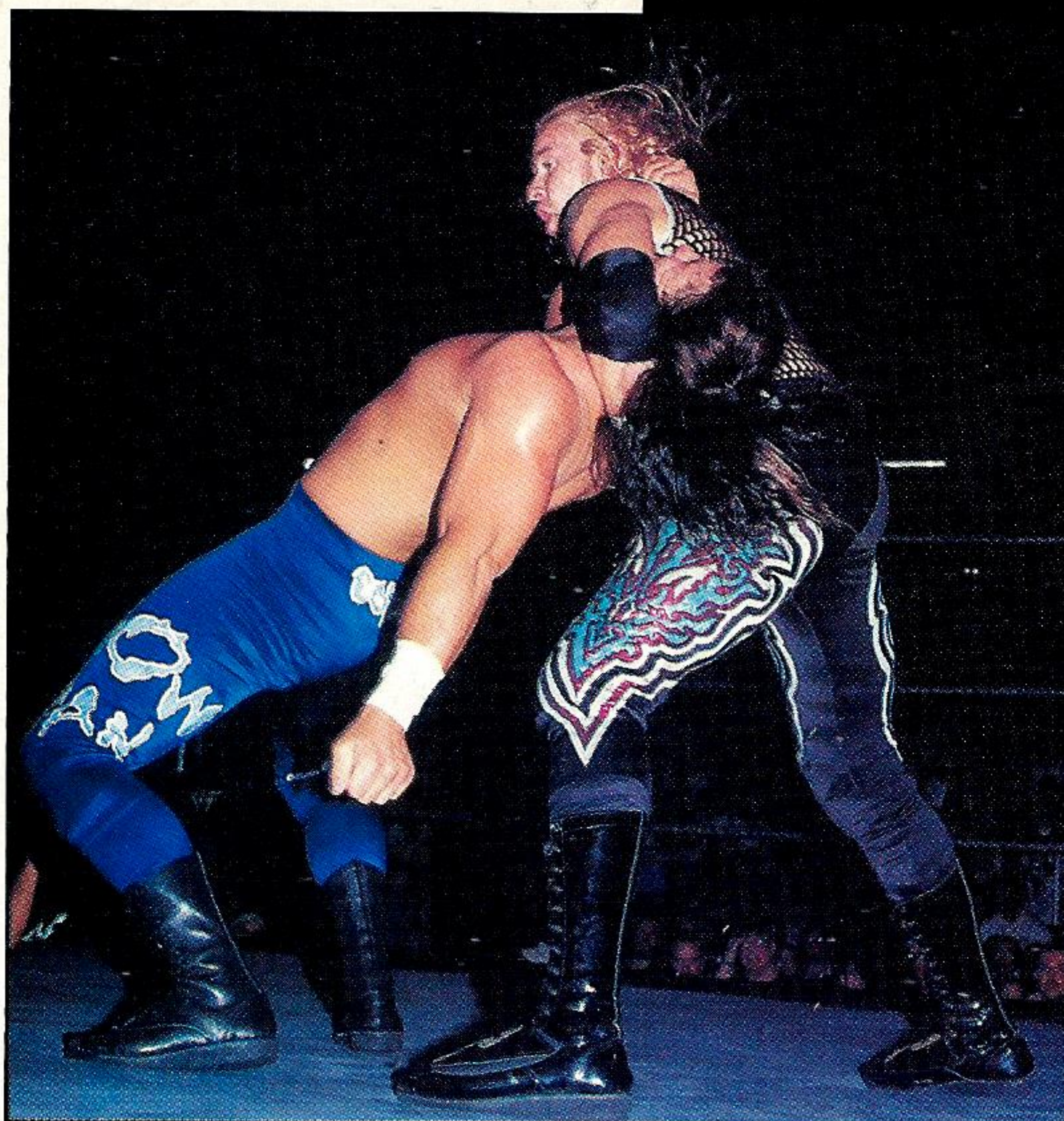
A: I think you know the wannabe sellout who used to be my tag team partner.

Q: Edge? You guys were an awesome team. Your matches against The Hardy Boyz were

among the greatest I've seen in my life. You four guys raised the bar for in-ring brutality.

A: Tell me about it. I limped around for weeks, licking my wounds, all because I couldn't find affordable health care in this miserable country. We don't have that problem in Canada, you know. The government back home values life and recognizes its responsibility to its citizens. Our Canadian leaders don't look the other way when corporate fat cats stuff their pockets with the money earned by the working class. They also don't seduce young interns and lie about it.

Q: Back to Edge. Why did you call him a sellout? I don't see where he's sold out to anyone or anything. You two went through an awful lot together, even before you came to

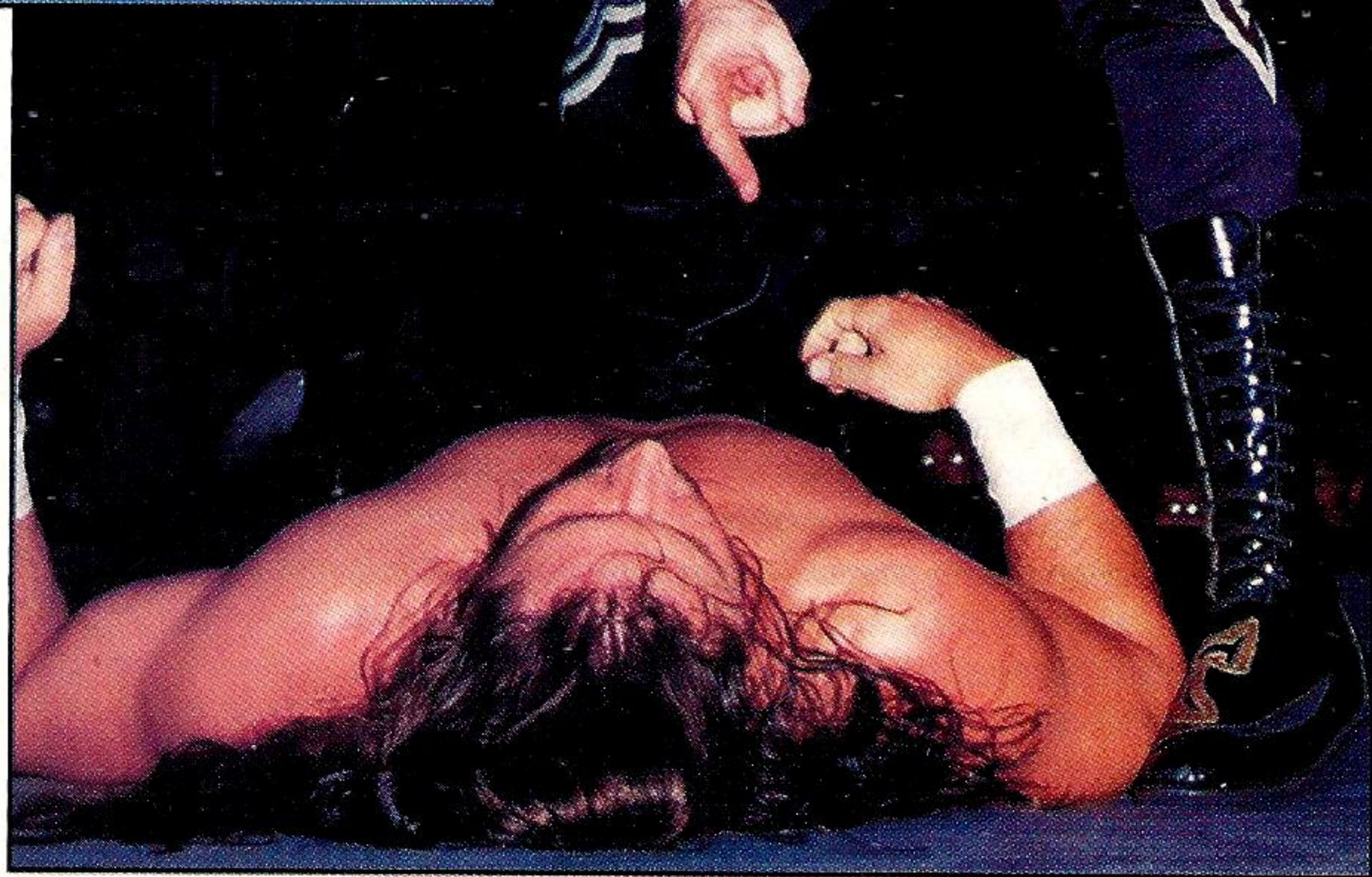


Christian seems less interested in outwrestling opponents such as Al Snow (left) than he is in taunting them (below), then going on and on about how bad the United States is. That's unfortunate. It'd be interesting to see how far he'd go if he'd concentrate a lot more on what goes on in the ring.

WWE. Besides, he's a proud Canadian, just like you.

A: He may be a Canadian by birth, but he sure as hell isn't anything like me. Canadian expatriate is more like it. Back when we were winning titles, I got a good whiff of the struggle we Canadians were facing in WWE. I wanted to do something about it. Edge wanted to make the fans happy. He chose his career path and I wrote him off once and for all. My heart is with my country and my compatriots, Lance Storm and Test, not the ignorant American fans. When I saw Edge come out to the ring with Hulk Hogan and Hogan had "Real American" blaring throughout the arena, I almost hurled. I was literally sick to my stomach. That's when I knew Edge was a lost cause. He might as well change his hometown to Venice Beach, California, *brother*.

Q: I'm curious as to why you haven't been able to get another very famous Canadian, Chris Jericho, to join your group. He made the jump from *Raw* to *Smackdown* at the same time you

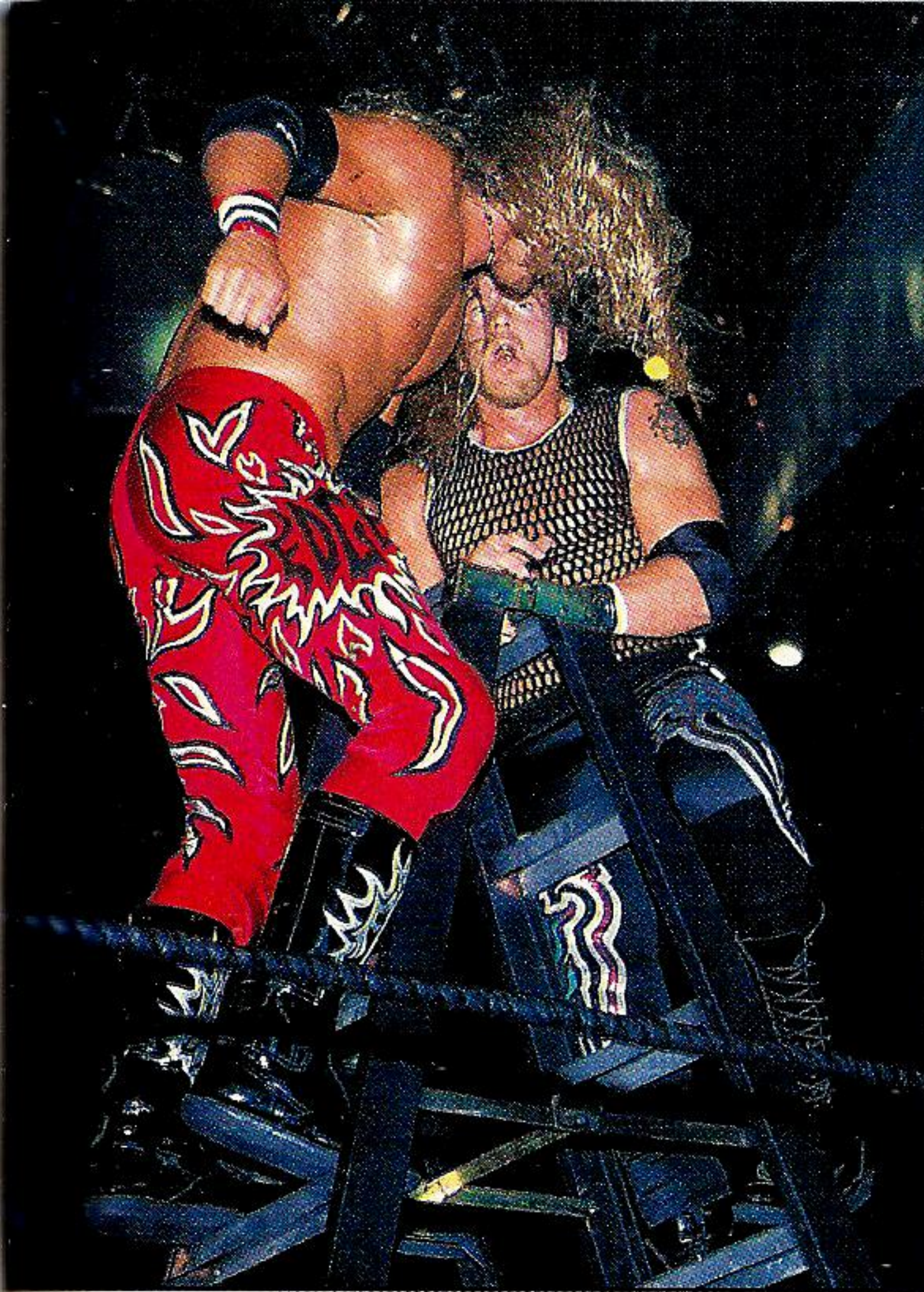


guys did and he's frustrated over his struggles lately. If this Canadian rhetoric is all the truth, why hasn't he bought into it?

A: Did you ask Chris Jericho that question? You're probably too lazy to do that. Let me just leave it at this: I consider Chris Jericho to be an ally. He's a proud Canadian, just like us. But he has his own thing going right now. If we think we need him, we wouldn't hesitate to work some sort of deal out with him. And

we'll be here for him if he needs a little backup. Canadians look out for each other. We're not selfish like people from a certain other large and prominent North American country.

Q: Wouldn't you and Lance have a better chance of furthering your cause by putting your hearts and minds into your title reign rather than your political agenda? The best way to get respect in any federation is by winning exciting matches and proving yourself



Last year's Christian vs. Edge feud produced some scintillating showdowns, including a very intense ladder match at No Mercy that Edge won to capture the Intercontinental title. Christian's obsession with trying to prove he was better than his old partner was tough to take, but compared to what we have to endure from him nowadays, that was nothing.

on the mat as a superior athlete.

A: Where does it say that we can't do both? In your beloved Constitution? You probably wouldn't know what's in the

Constitution, anyway. In case you haven't noticed, the public schools in this country are a disgrace. But nobody cares. You know why? Everybody's too busy sucking down Big Macs and watching *SpongeBob SquarePants* to care. Anyway, the last time I checked, no team on *Raw* or *Smackdown* came remotely close to taking these title belts from us. Lance and I are motivated by a higher cause. Believe it when I tell you we're not in it for the money or the fame. That stuff is for all you greedy yanks.

Q: Apparently, steering this discussion away from the anti-American stuff is going to be difficult ...

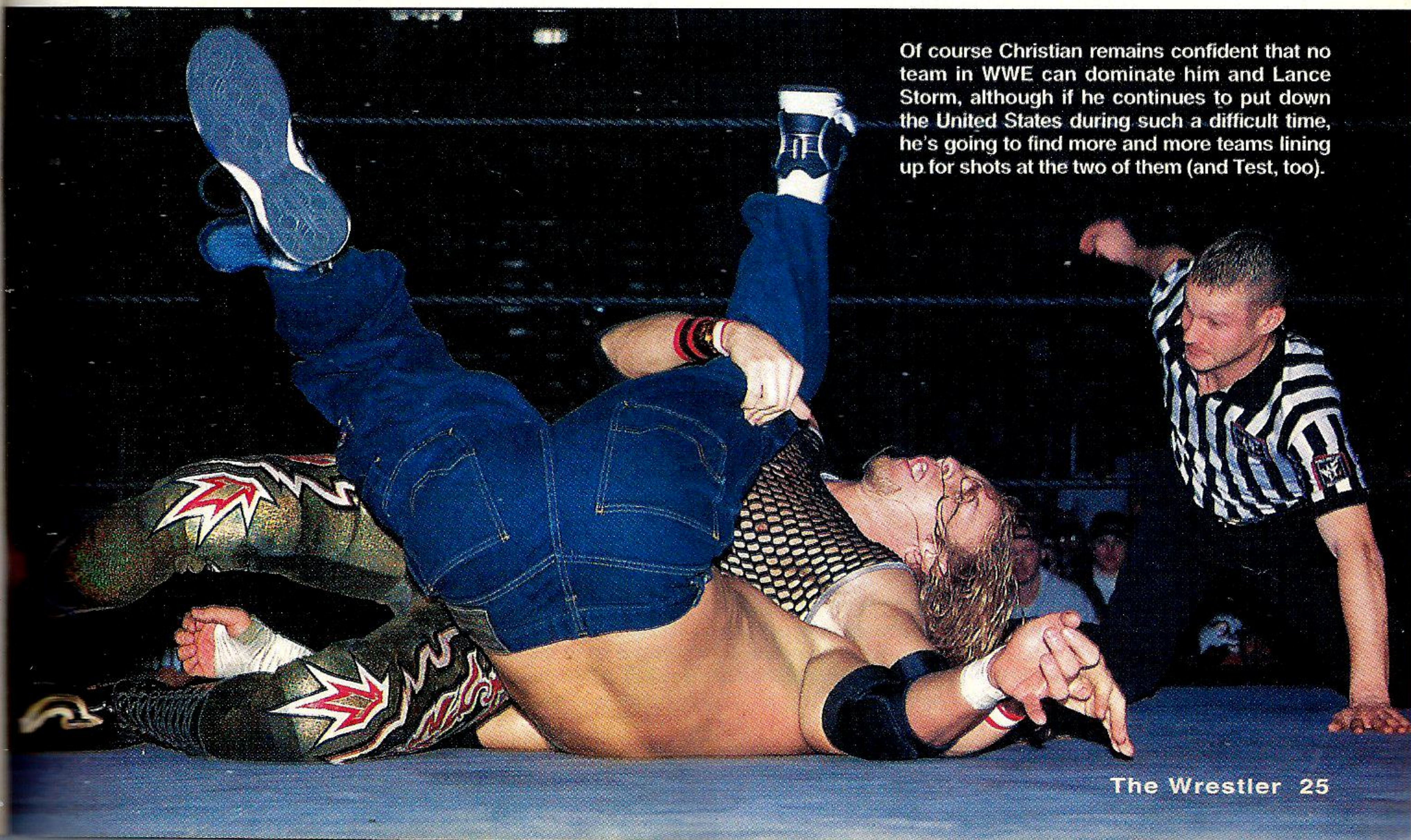
A: That's too bad. I have a hard time controlling my emotions when it comes to this stuff.

Q: You mean like you couldn't control your emotions a few months ago whenever the fans took their eyes off you for one second? What was up with those temper tantrums anyway?

A: That's exactly what I mean. I wrestled my heart and soul out for a bunch of ungrateful American fans. No matter what I did in the ring, those people out there refused to recognize my efforts and skills. Meanwhile, they'd go crazy every time Edge waved his hair or Dallas Page flashed that stupid smile of his. What's wrong with these people?! Any wrestler with an ounce of pride would have been just as frustrated as me.

Q: Any wrestler with an ounce of pride wouldn't have behaved as if he were mired in the final stage of the terrible twos. In all fairness, Christian, there's no defense for the way you behaved. It only made you look bad.

A: See, just like a typical pigheaded American. You don't want to hear anything. You don't want to listen to reason and logic. Your puny little mind is already closed to the truth and you don't want to hear anything. That's why this whole interview was just a colossal waste of my time. Now if you'll excuse me, I have another match to prepare for and the honor of a wonderful homeland to defend. □

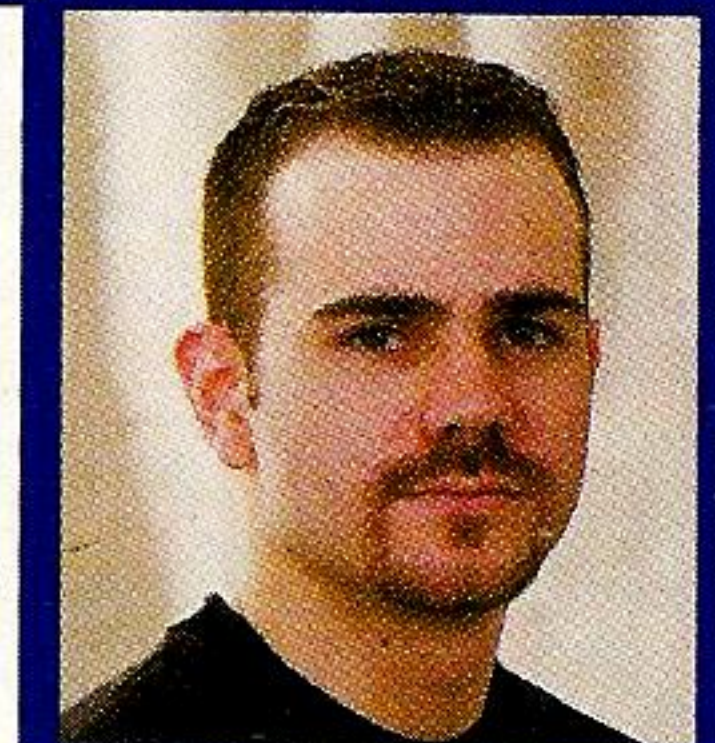


Of course Christian remains confident that no team in WWE can dominate him and Lance Storm, although if he continues to put down the United States during such a difficult time, he's going to find more and more teams lining up for shots at the two of them (and Test, too).

from bell to bell

By Mike Quackenbush

[Editor's note: Mike Quackenbush, who has held numerous titles throughout the Northeast and elsewhere, files reports on the life of a young independent wrestler seeking to make an impact on the business. In this issue, he writes about how the general public perception of the wrestling business, which has changed so much for the better in the last decade, could change again for the worse because of one horrific incident in California.]



An appalling attack on California-based independent wrestler The Messiah this summer stunned the wrestling world and, as Mike Quackenbush notes, could undo a lot of the hard work many wrestlers have done to change the public perception of those in the industry ... if it is discovered that it was, indeed, wrestling-related.

GIANT VIDEO WALLS, impressive pyrotechnic displays, and wild light and laser shows are just some of the modern advances that are becoming more and more commonplace in wrestling today. Wrestling is referred to less and less as a sport, and more and more as an industry or business. It's an incredibly modern business, considering that it is a *sport* we can trace back thousands of years. Of course, it has evolved so much just in the last two decades that it doesn't begin to resemble what our grandparents might think of as wrestling.

If you could go back 91 years to 1911, you'd find very few similarities to what we see in arenas today. Back then, wrestling was *always* referred to as sport; there was no such term as sports entertainment, and there was no reason to have one. It appealed to a different audience as well; a typical photograph from this era would depict a dimly lit, smoke-filled arena packed by middle-aged men chomping on fat cigars. Wrestling had a seedy feel to it for years and was sometimes likened by newspapers to a sideshow attraction. Gambling on the outcome of wrestling matches was big business for a while.

In 1911, the World champion was Frank Gotch, a native of Iowa, and a man with a reputation for using underhanded tactics. Three years earlier, Gotch won the title from "The Russian Lion" George Hackenschmidt when Hackenschmidt stormed out of the ring in a fit of rage. Hackenschmidt complained not only to the referee, but to the press afterward that Gotch had covered his body in an oil, making it difficult to grapple him. The official didn't listen to Hackenschmidt

during the match, and upon seeing him leave the ring, pronounced the match a forfeit and gave the championship to Gotch.

The much-anticipated rematch, three years in the making, took place in Chicago. Hackenschmidt arrived in the area early to train and prepare for the match, which would be a best-of-three-falls contest. The night before, while sparring with a local wrestler, Hackenschmidt's knee was severely injured. The next day, Gotch had an easy time with his hobbled opponent, beating him in two consecutive falls. As legend has it, the knee injury was no accident. It has long been speculated that a cautious Gotch reached some sort of agreement with Hackenschmidt's sparring partner that Hackenschmidt would be significantly softened up for the reigning champion.

I'm not certain whether anyone has conclusively proven that Gotch had any involvement in the injuring of Hackenschmidt 91 years ago. The story stands out in my mind as an indicator of how much harder things must have been for wrestlers back then. The wrestling business, especially in the post-World War II era, seemed more like a mob soap opera than a part of the entertainment industry. Fortunately, we live in more civil times, and the men and women in the wrestling industry of 2002 are a little more cultured, a little more civilized, and a lot less like a villainous cadre pulled from the pages of Detective Comics. Or are we?

Independent wrestler Messiah, from Canyon Country, California, might tell a different story. On August 1, two men entered his apartment, struck him with a fish bowl and a chair, then used garden shears to cut off one of his thumbs. The investigators on the case have come forward and commented that they are looking into the possibility that the incident is



All it takes is one look at a picture taken shortly after a Frank Gotch-George Hackenschmidt match nearly a full century ago for anyone to figure out wrestling has changed an awful lot since the early-1900s. But after reading about The Messiah, Quackenbush has to wonder about just how much it really has.

related to his involvement in wrestling.

Messiah has been a somewhat hot commodity in the last year, sought after by promotions ranging from EPIC on the West Coast to CZW on the East Coast. Alliances have changed as the Messiah's star has risen.

If Detective Victor Lewandowski of the Santa Clarita Valley Sheriff's Department is right, and the attack is linked to Messiah's rising career as a wrestler, it will be a dark moment for the pro wrestling industry as a whole. For all our advances in the last few decades, for all the strides our business has taken, we will have regressed. It could take us back 50 years or more, and I'll explain why.

Since the Dr. George Zahorian/steroid trials that gave the McMahon family headaches in the 1990s, the public's perception of wrestling has changed. It's taken us years to convince the world that pro wrestlers are not unintelligent, oversized brutes who should be locked in cages when they're not in a ring. Men like Mick Foley struck a blow for us all by penning best-selling books. Rey Misterio

Jr. showed the world the impact a skillful aerial artist can have on the business. The Rock could be the next big thing in Hollywood. Jesse Ventura was elected governor of Minnesota. In a multitude of ways, we've been fighting to shake off not only the stigma of the steroid trials, but the stigma that all wrestlers have had for a long, long time. We're not cavemen in Speedos delivering monosyllabic rants before pummeling each other. We are authors, actors, politicians, entertainers, and many other things.

How quickly some people will forget all our forward strides if it is discovered that the current situation in wrestling begot the severing of Messiah's thumb. What will we have we become then? We won't even be gangsters anymore; we'll just be the pack of savages the media has wanted to make us out to be for years. We owe it to ourselves, to our fans, and to the business that puts food on our tables to police each other, to be vigilant, and to safeguard ourselves from slipping out of our tights and boots and into dinosaur hide, once again dwelling in caves. □

Spotlight On...

SHAWN MICHAELS

LONG BEFORE HE became a "legendary WWF superstar," Shawn Michaels was considered too small to make it as a pro wrestler. Weighing less than 230 pounds, Michaels was a "little man" with aspirations to make it in a big man's game. One of Gorilla Monsoon's favorite sayings succinctly summed up the WWF ideology from the late-1980s: A good big man will always beat a good little man.

"The Heartbreak Kid" begged to disagree.

Michaels was born Michael Shawn Hickenbottom on July 22, 1965, in San Antonio, Texas. Once he saw his first pro wrestling match at the age of 12, he knew he wanted to be a wrestler. He prepared

for his chosen career by competing in wrestling and gymnastics in high school. Upon graduation, he enrolled in a wrestling school and was trained by Jose Lothario. After two months of training, Lothario secured his new protege a match in the Mid-South area, and the 19-year-old defeated Art Crews in his debut.

After his stint in Mid-South, Michaels traveled to the Central States territory, where he met Marty Jannetty. Michaels and the older Jannetty became friends and vowed that whoever reached a major organization first would call the other. In the meantime, Michaels won his first singles title, the Central States TV championship, and the Texas All-Star tag team title with Paul Diamond.

When Jannetty signed with the AWA, he was true to his word and arranged a tryout for Michaels. The Central States alumni formed a tag team known as The Midnight Rockers. While the Rockers proved popular with kids and female friends, wrestling purists saw them as something of a boy band amalgamation of the NWA's Rock 'n' Roll Express and Midnight Express.

Michaels and Jannetty quickly worked their way up the ladder of contention, however, and started feuding with the tag champs, Buddy Rose and Doug Somers. On January 27, 1987, the Rockers beat Somers and Rose for the tag title. The win quickly went to their heads, however, and the young team issued an open challenge.

Their exuberance cost them when the unheralded team of Boris Zukhov and Soldat Ustinov upset them for the straps four months later.

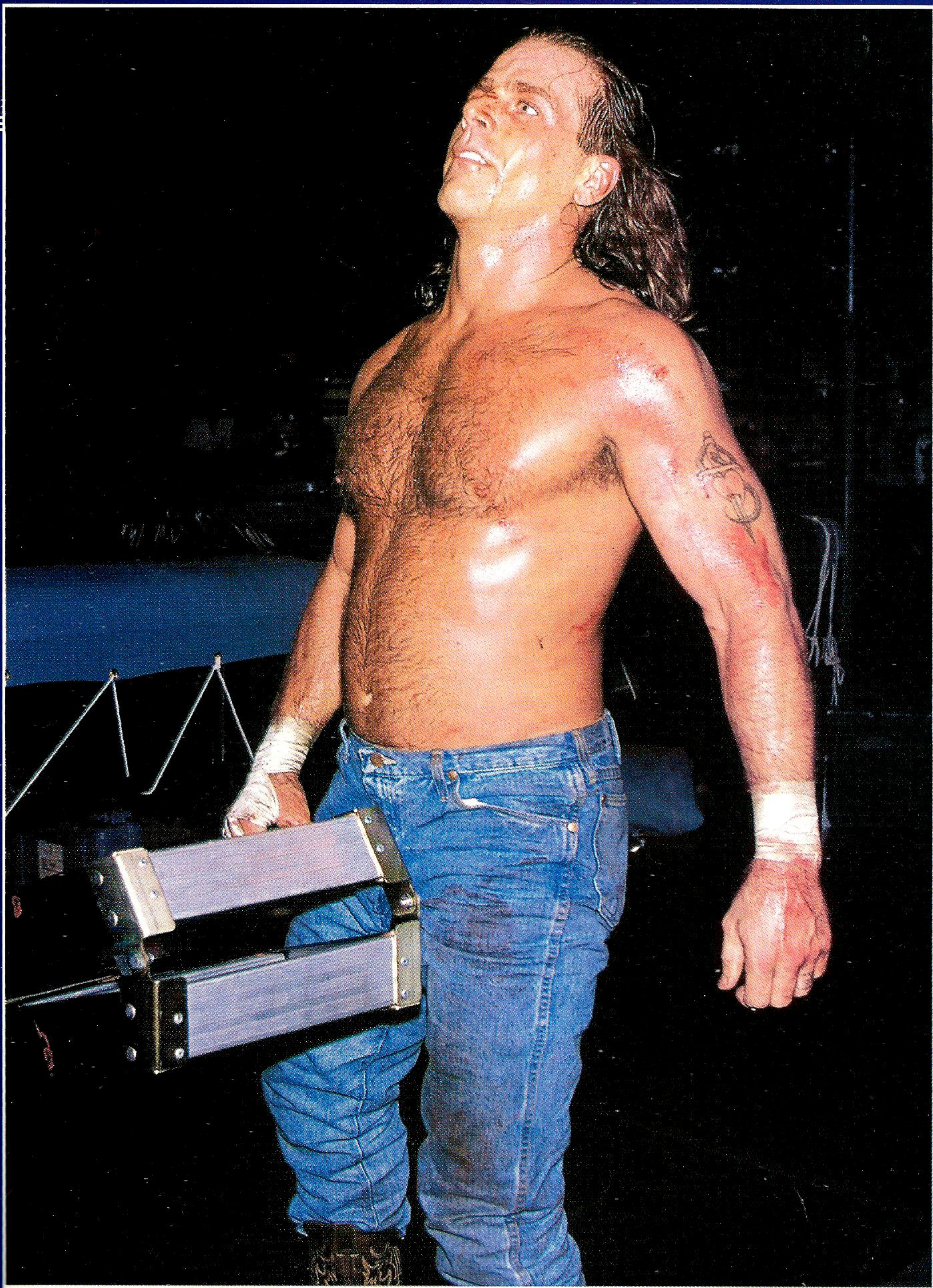
Following that loss, Michaels and Jannetty were drawn into a feud against the invading "Original" Midnight Express of Randy Rose and Dennis Condrey, managed by Paul E. Dangerously. The Rockers were severely tested by the veterans, but managed to beat them to regain the tag title on December 27. They lost the belts three months later to Badd Company, Pat Tanaka and Michaels' former partner Paul Diamond.

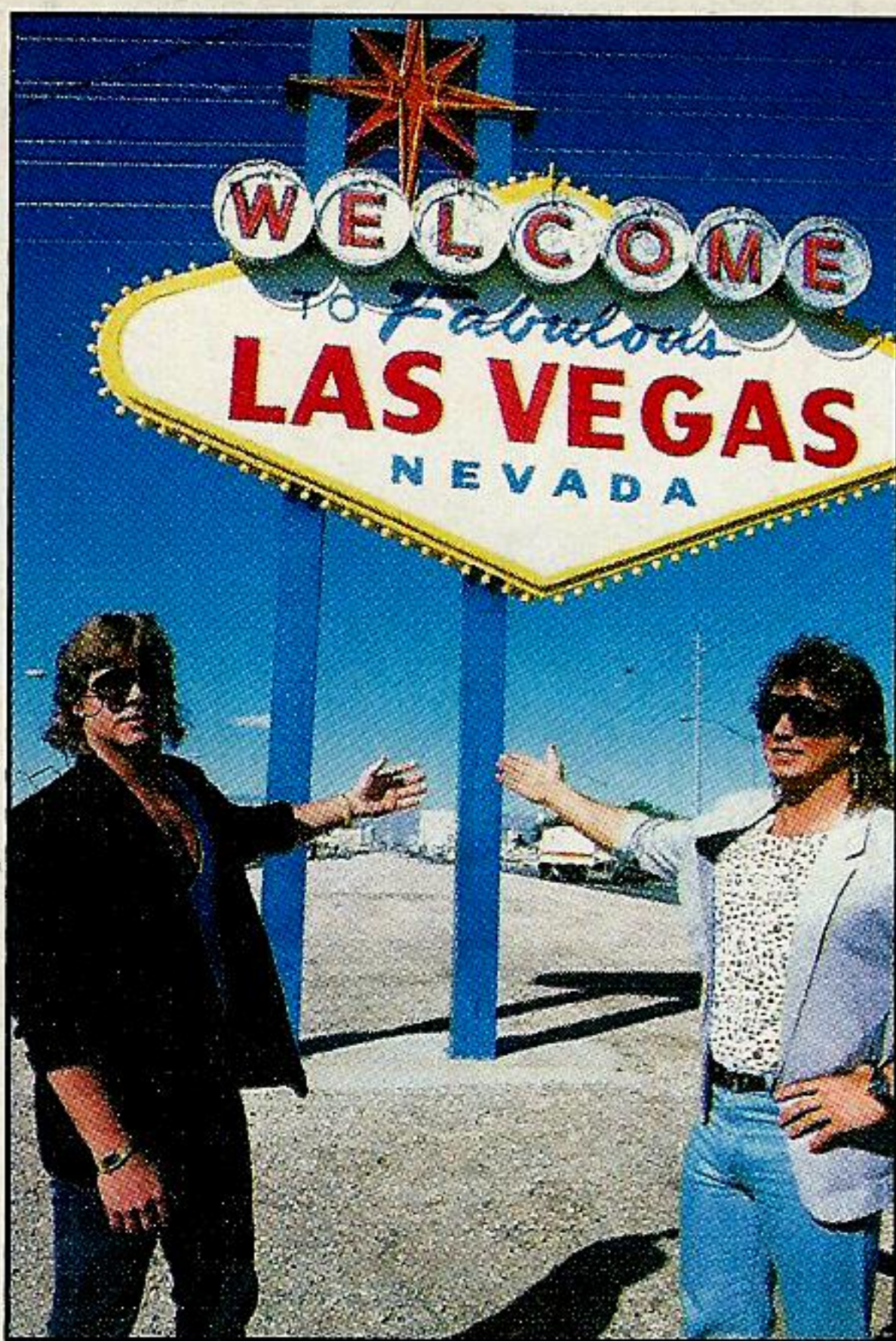
After that loss, the Rockers flirted with the WWF before returning to Central States. Then, in 1989, after months of negotiations, Jannetty and Michaels finally debuted in the land of the giants.

Known simply as The Rockers, they jumped into a feud



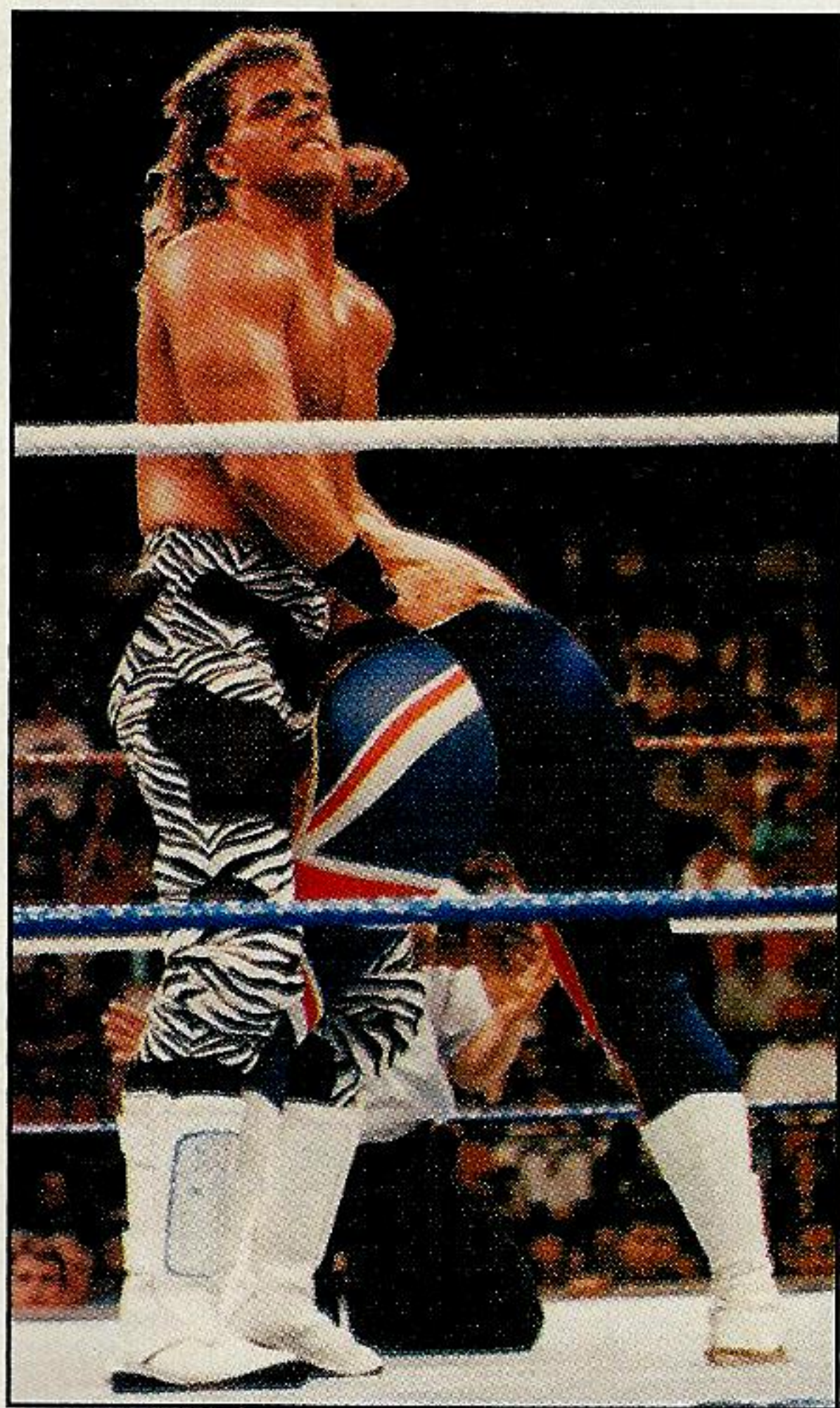
December 1986: Five years before he signed Sherri Martel to be his manager in the WWF, Shawn Michaels viewed her as an enemy in the AWA. He even went so far as to spank her. Their eventual split in the WWF wasn't exactly amicable, either.





February 1987: Fifteen years ago, Las Vegas was Michaels' (and partner Marty Jannetty's) kind of town. The Midnight Rockers were known to party hard. They were also very successful in the ring, as they won two AWA tag titles together and were robbed of what looked like a WWF World tag title win.

with the rulebreaking Rougeau brothers. The WWF's tag team roster was packed with championship-caliber teams at the time, and The Rockers struggled against



October 1992: It took him many tries and a lot of hard work, but Michaels finally captured a singles title in the WWF when he defeated Davey Boy Smith for the I-C belt a decade ago. He'd go on to become the first man to hold four different titles in the company.

The Hart Foundation, Demolition, Arn Anderson and Tully Blanchard, and The Powers of Pain. The wrestling press questioned whether the team was big enough to compete in the biggest of the big time.

On October 30, 1990, it looked like The Rockers had finally silenced the critics. They appeared to have beaten The Hart Foundation for the WWF tag title in a best-of-three-falls match. However, a few days later, WWF President Jack Tunney declared the match a no-contest, ruling that the top rope had become loose during the second fall, somehow affecting the outcome of the match. It was the closest The Rockers would ever come to the WWF tag title as a duo.

Much like The Hardy Boyz of 2002, The Rockers spent most of 1991 dogged by rumors of dissension. Big wins were followed by crushing losses, as Michaels and Jannetty were unable to make the most of their few title shots. Not long after they were on the losing end of an eight-man tag team elimination match at the 1991 Survivor Series, the inevitable happened.

During one of Brutus Beefcake's "Barber Shop" interview segments, Michaels blamed Jannetty for the loss. After it appeared they had smoothed over their differences, Michaels blindsided Jannetty with a superkick, sending his partner crashing through a plate glass window. In January 1992, Michaels signed "Sensational" Sherri Martel as his new manager and dubbed himself Sherri's "Boy Toy." On April 29, 1992, Michaels scored the biggest win of his singles career, a countout victory over Intercontinental champ Bret Hart.

Even though he put forth some of his best efforts, Michaels was never able to beat Hart for the I-C title. He also had no success against World champ Randy Savage. However, Michaels teamed with childhood idol Ric Flair against Hart and Savage on a number of house shows in the summer of 1992. Despite the

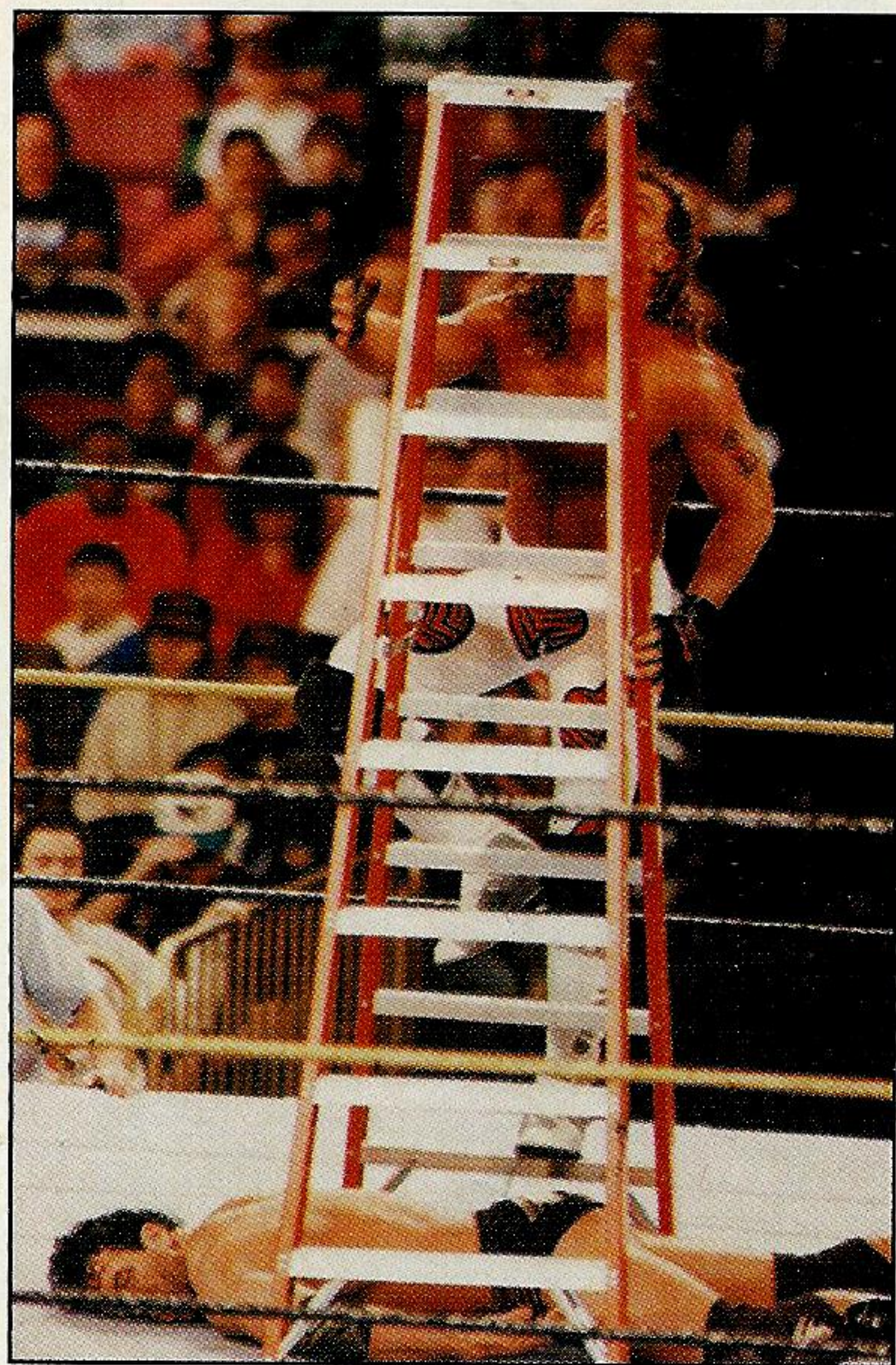
fact that Michaels was usually the one pinned in those matches, it was a tremendous learning experience.

One of the most ridiculous matches of Michaels' career took place at SummerSlam 1992, at which he wrestled Rick "The Model" Martel. They agreed not to hit each other in the face for fearing of ruining their good looks. The match ended in a draw after Sherri fainted when tempers began to flare.

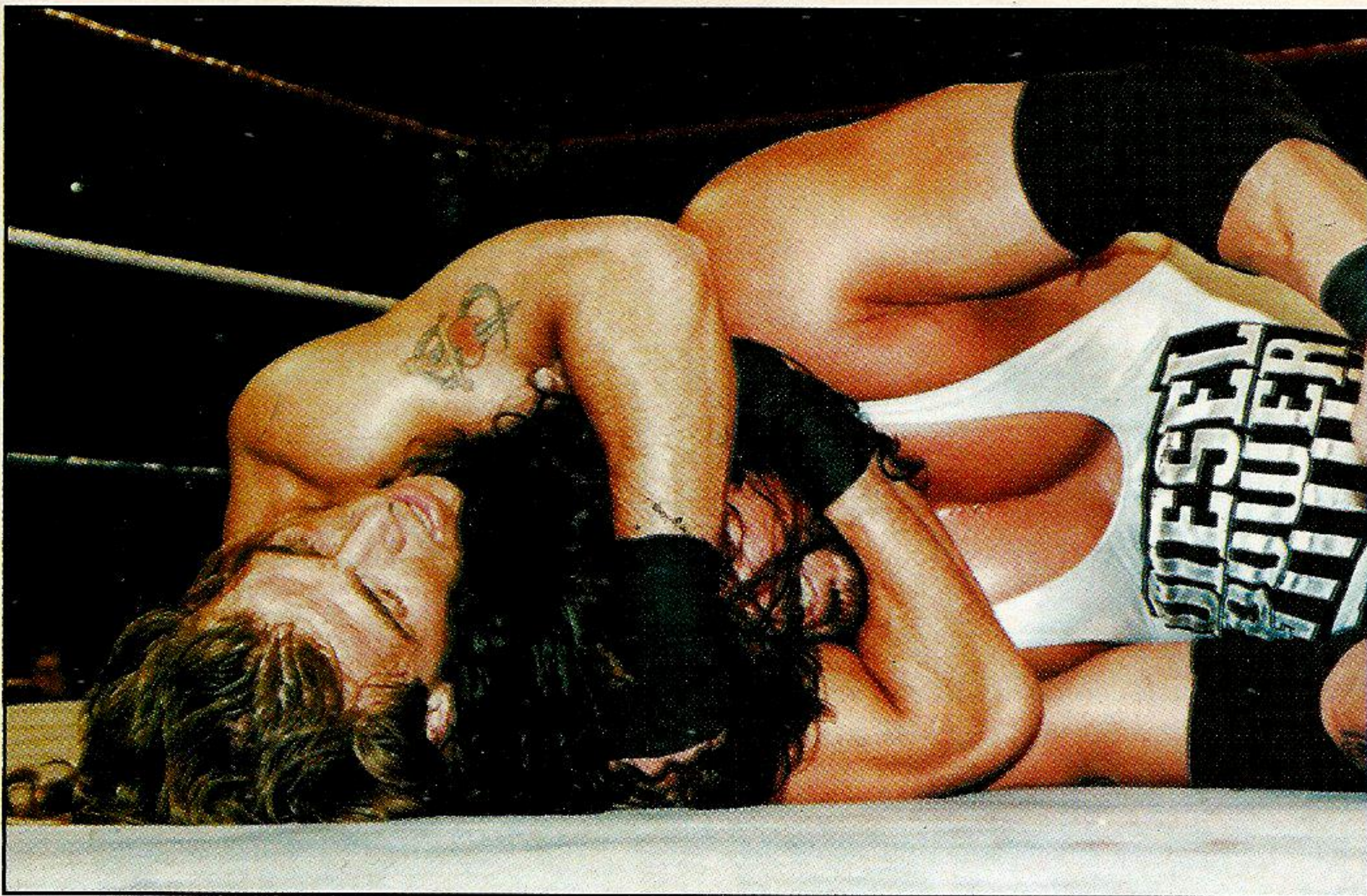
That fall, Jannetty returned to the WWF seeking vengeance. But Michaels looked at his former partner as a steppingstone, and after scoring wins over Jannetty, Michaels earned a shot at I-C champ Davey Boy Smith and upset the Brit for the belt. That was when he publicly fired Sherri, saying she ought to "stay at home like a woman should."

As I-C champ, Michaels faced Hart in the main event of the 1992 Survivor Series. Unlike what happened at the same event five years later, Hart left the ring with the World title belt that night.

Six months later, on a live *Raw* on May 17, 1993, Michaels issued an open



March 1994: Ask a bunch of Shawn Michaels fans what HBK's greatest match was and you'll hear the first big ladder match with Razor Ramon (Scott Hall) mentioned a lot. Shawn was magnificent in defeat in that showdown.



April 1995: A lot of people expected to see Shawn realize his childhood dream of becoming WWF champ when he battled former bodyguard Diesel (Kevin Nash) at WrestleMania XI. He lost, in part due to botched interference by new bodyguard Sid Vicious.

challenge to any wrestler in the building. The gauntlet was picked up by Jannetty, who just happened to be in the audience. Jannetty made the most of his opportunity

and won the belt after "Mr. Perfect" Curt Hennig distracted Michaels, but Michaels regained the belt just 20 days later.

To make sure no one else interfered, Michaels introduced the world to his new bodyguard, Kevin "Diesel" Nash, on the night he regained the gold, and Diesel's interference was instrumental in his win.

In late-September, Tunney stripped Michaels of the title for failing to meet unspecified contractual obligations. Razor Ramon (Scott Hall) won the vacant championship in Michaels' absence. Michaels returned to the WWF at Survivor Series and claimed he was the rightful champ. The Razor-Shawn feud culminated in a groundbreaking ladder match at WrestleMania X. Ramon won, but Michaels' performance won him tremendous respect in the industry.

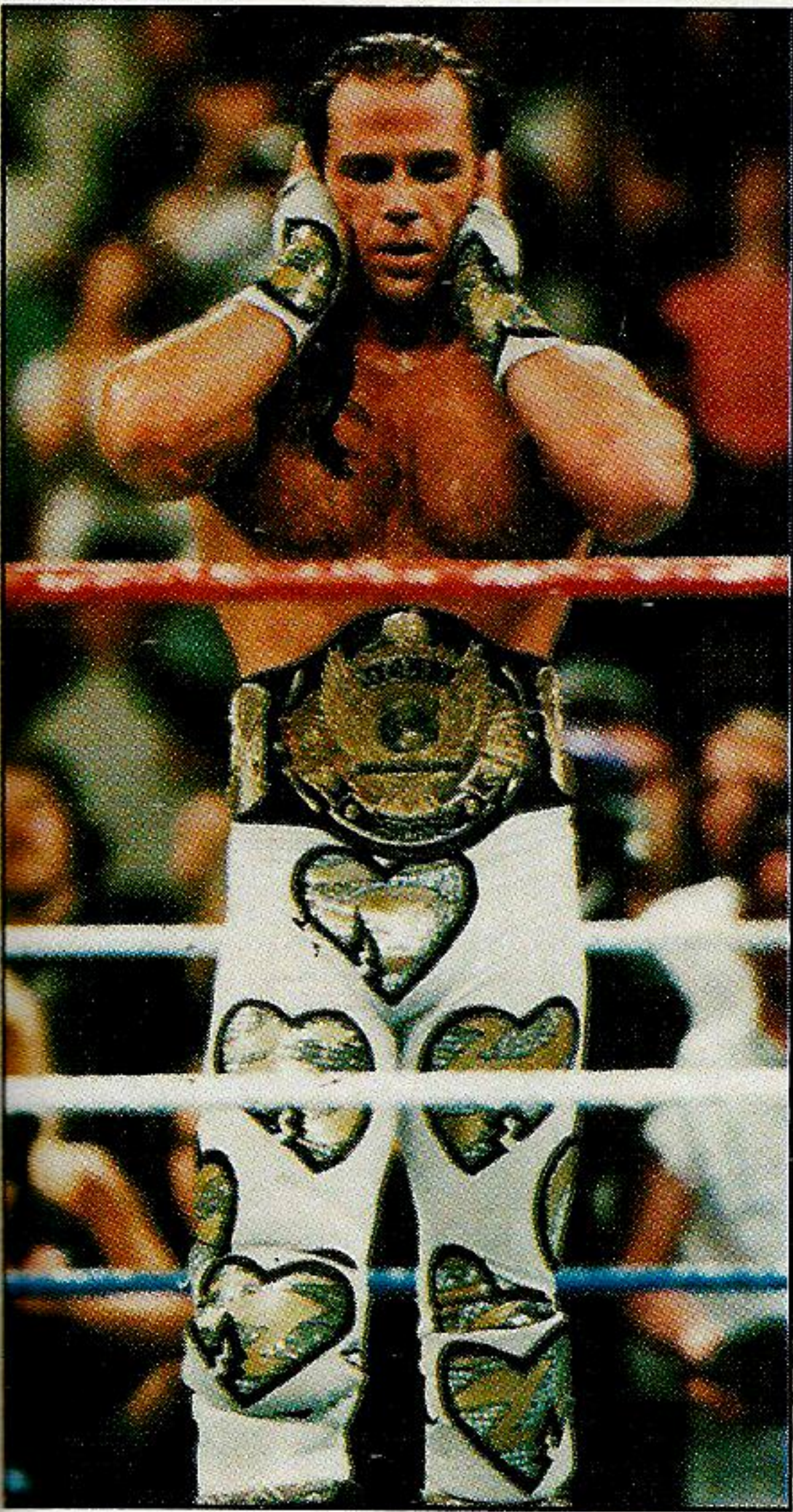
On August 28, 1994, Michaels and Diesel defeated The Headshrinkers to win the WWF tag title, but it would soon be time for another clash of egos. After Diesel and Michaels came to blows at Survivor Series, the tag title was declared vacant.

Diesel went on to win the WWF title three days later, and Michaels won the 1995 Royal Rumble to earn a WrestleMania title shot against his former bodyguard. Before that could happen, HBK introduced Sid Vicious as his *new* bodyguard. Michaels came to the ring with Jenny McCarthy at the big event; Diesel countered by arriving with Pamela Anderson and beating Michaels with a power bomb. Botched interference by Sid contributed to that loss.

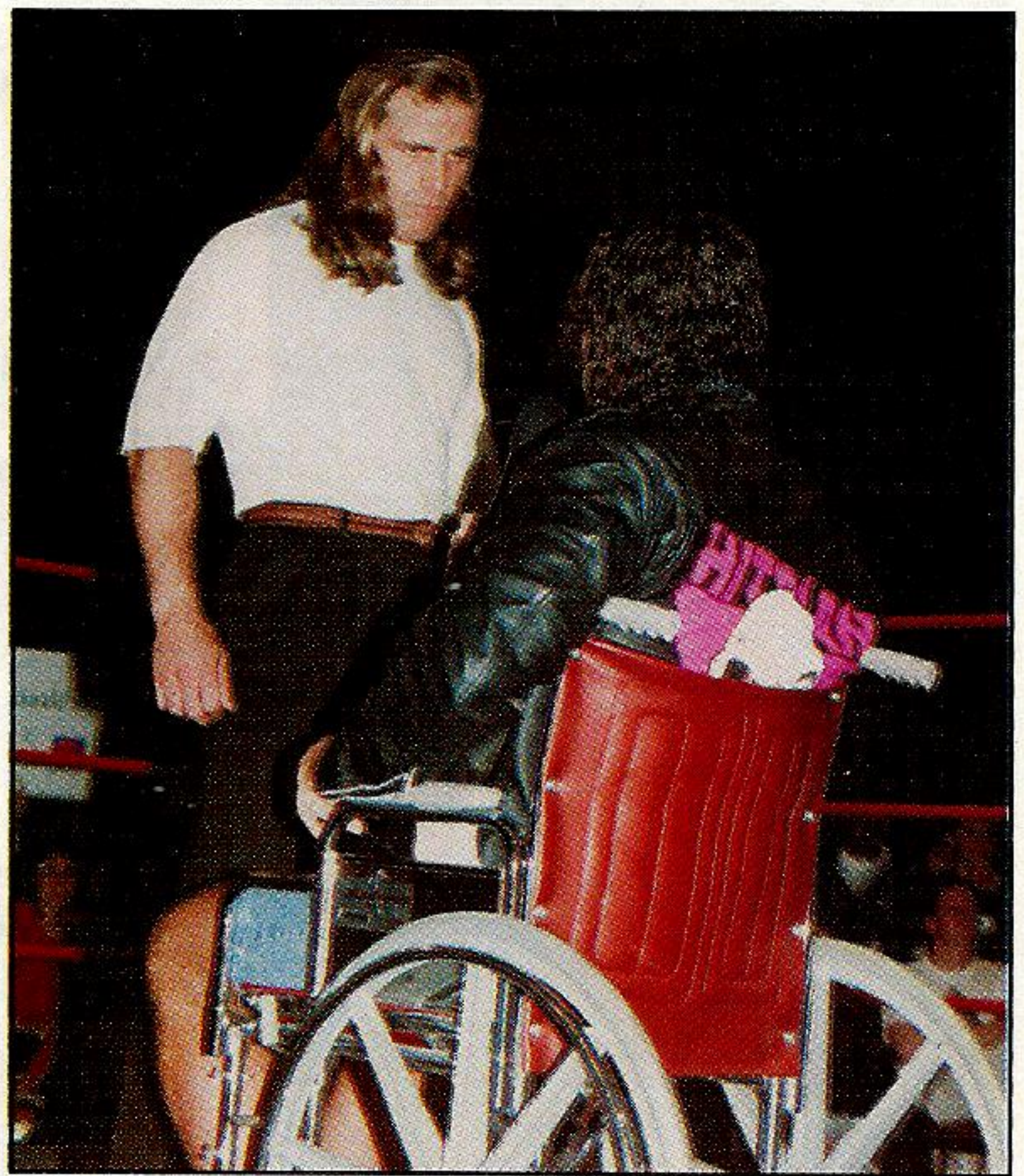
The following night on *Raw*, Michaels professed his respect for Diesel, enraging Vicious. Vicious attacked Michaels, putting him out of action for six weeks. When Shawn returned as a fan favorite, he defeated Vicious in

several matches. On July 23, 1995, he won his third I-C belt by beating Jeff Jarrett. He also avenged his ladder match loss to Ramon by beating him in a classic rematch at SummerSlam 1995.

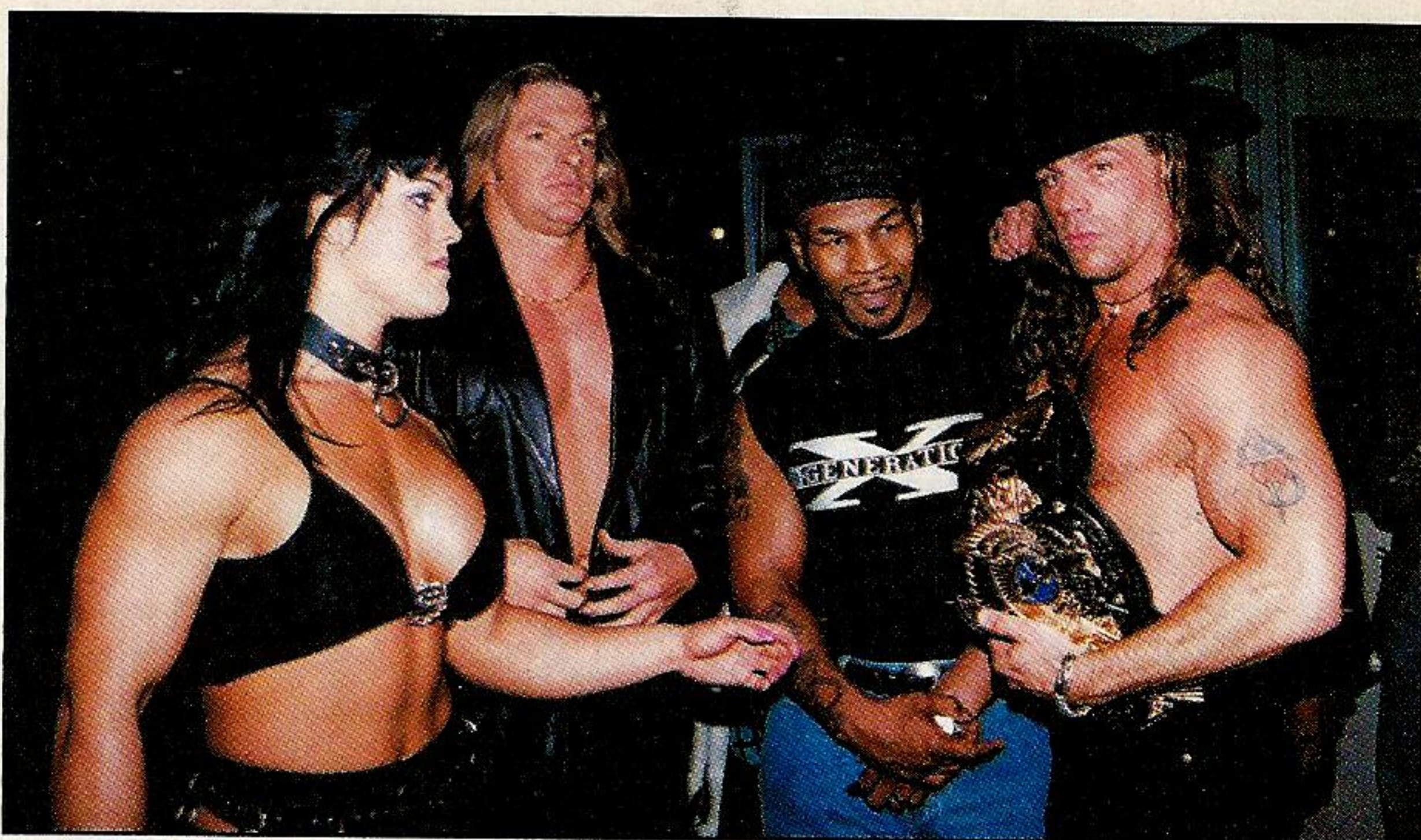
In October 1995, Michaels cited injuries he suffered when he was attacked by a group of men outside a Syracuse,



March 1996: One year after losing to WWF champ Diesel at WrestleMania XI, HBK finally got to strap that championship belt around his waist after he unseated Bret Hart at WM XII. He was overcome by emotion.

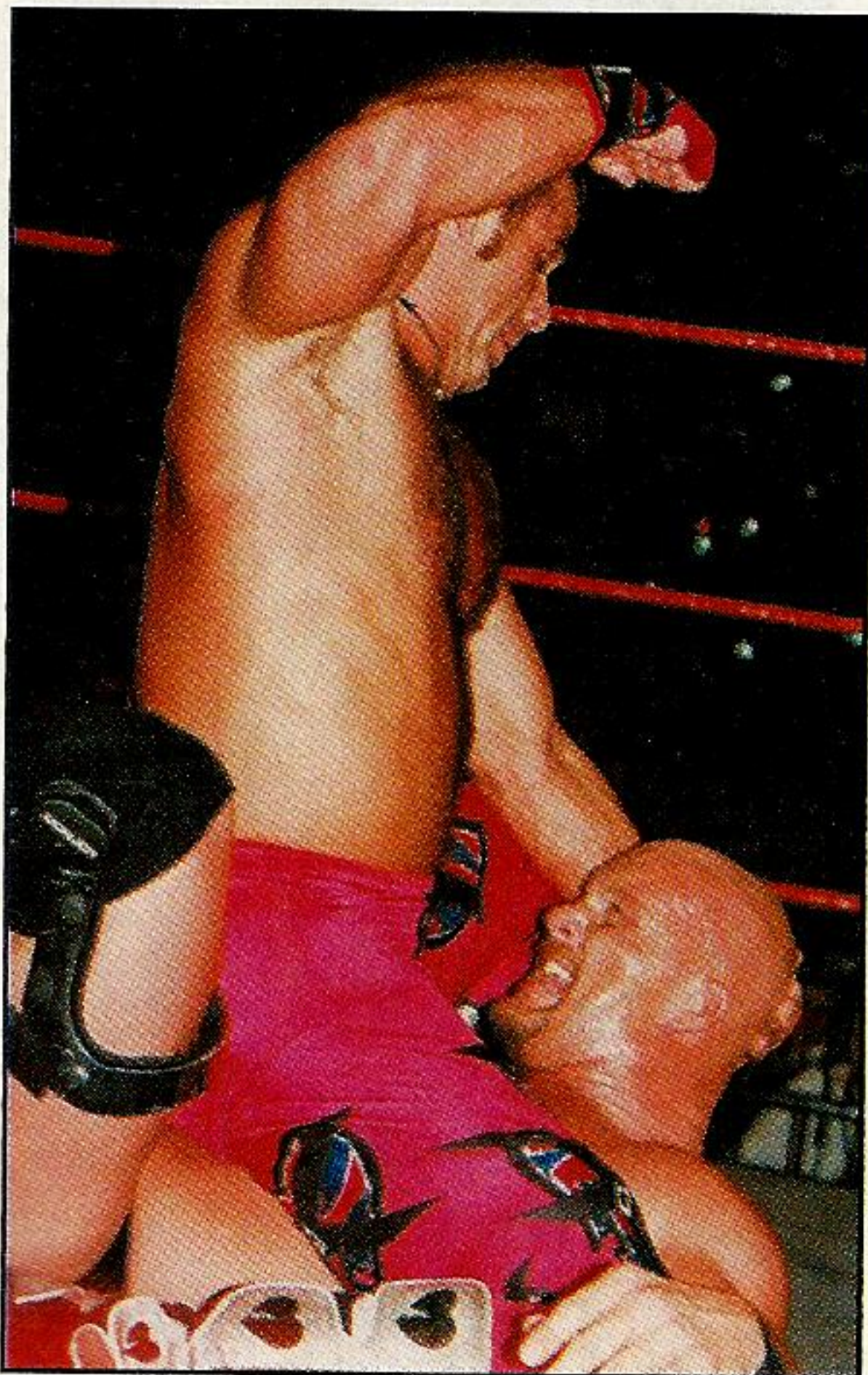


May 1997: The feud between Michaels and Hart didn't end at WrestleMania XII. Hardly. It only got hotter, uglier, and much more personal. Here Michaels stares down the hobbled "Hitman" seconds before superkicking him out of his wheelchair.



March 1998: DeGeneration X was WWF "Attitude" personified. WWF fans couldn't get enough of the clique formed by Michaels, Chyna, and Triple-H, even if they were heels. Even former heavyweight boxing champ Mike Tyson got in on the act for a while.

New York, nightclub in forfeiting the I-C belt to Shane "Dean" Douglas. That allowed Michaels to focus on the World title when he returned. On January 21, 1996, Michaels won his second Royal Rumble to earn another World title shot. He brought back Lothario as his mentor and rededicated himself to fulfilling his childhood dream. Two months later at WrestleMania, Michaels defeated Hart in overtime of a 60-minute "Ironman" match



March 1998: In spite of serious back problems that left him in severe pain and limited what he could do as a wrestler, HBK gutted it out against Steve Austin at WrestleMania XIV. He turned in a nice performance in losing the WWF title in what he thought would be his final WWF match.

to win the WWF title. Hart later complained that the contract never called for an overtime period and claimed he was screwed by the WWF.

Michaels survived stiff challenges from Diesel, Davey Boy Smith, Mankind, and Vader and held the belt until November 17, when he was pinned by Vicious. On January 19, 1997, he regained the title by beating Sid. Michaels would vacate the title a few weeks later, citing burnout and a knee injury.

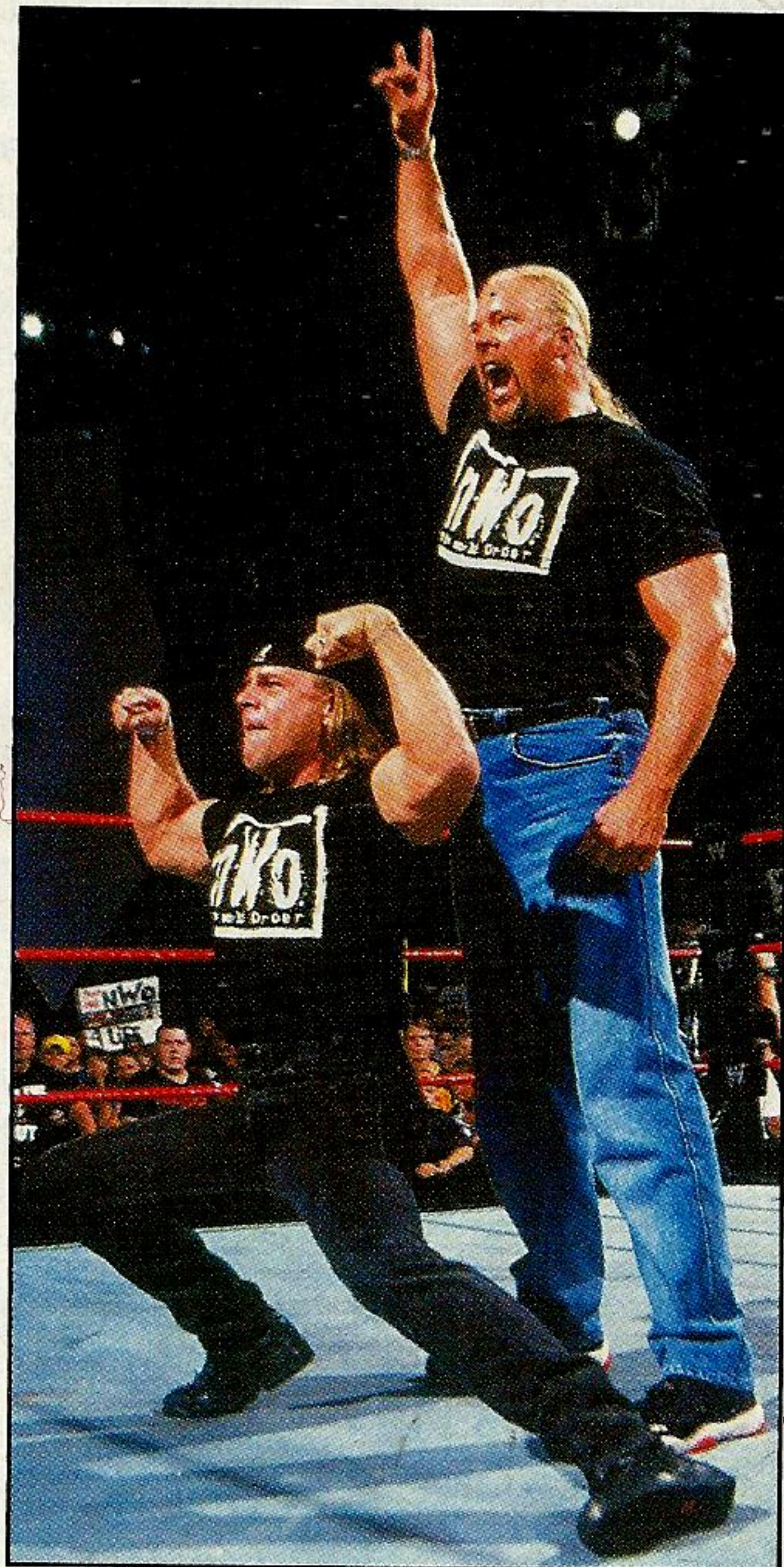
In mid-1997, Michaels' arrogance returned. Together with his pal Hunter Hearst Helmsley and Chyna, he formed DeGeneration X, a controversial and often-vulgar clique determined to make life miserable for the WWF powers-that-be. On September 20, Michaels pinned Smith to win the European title, making him the WWF's first "Grand Slam" champion.

After months of goading, Michaels got WWF champ Hart to grant him a match at the 1997 Survivor Series. In the most controversial match in wrestling history, Michaels regained the title when Vince McMahon had referee Earl Hebner call for the bell as Hart got caught in a sharpshooter, thereby screwing the "Hitman" out of the WWF title shortly before he was to leave to join WCW. (Earlier this summer, Michaels finally admitted on TV that he was in on McMahon's screw job all along.)

By the spring of 1998, Michaels' back was in very bad shape. His doc-

tors warned him to retire or risk permanent injury or paralysis. Michaels held on long enough to face Steve Austin in the main event of WrestleMania XIV. Austin won the belt, and Michaels took a Stone-Cold stunner and a knockout punch from "enforcer referee" Mike Tyson.

Since retiring from WWF competition, Michaels has wrestled one bunkhouse match against former partner Paul Diamond for a small Texas-based promotion he briefly owned and ran, and briefly served as WWF commissioner. Then, this spring, he joined the NWO. After the group was disbanded a few weeks later, he was viciously attacked by Triple-H in a parking lot. It was "The Heartbreak Kid" who issued the challenge for their match at SummerSlam. Now the big question is this: Was it a one-match comeback, or will we see Michaels in the ring again in the upcoming months? □



June 2002: Kevin Nash got the band back together in WWE in 2002, but the reunion tour didn't last long. The NWO never caught fire in McMahon-land, and shortly after Michaels was added to the mix, Nash tore a quadriceps muscle. It was the death knell for the group.

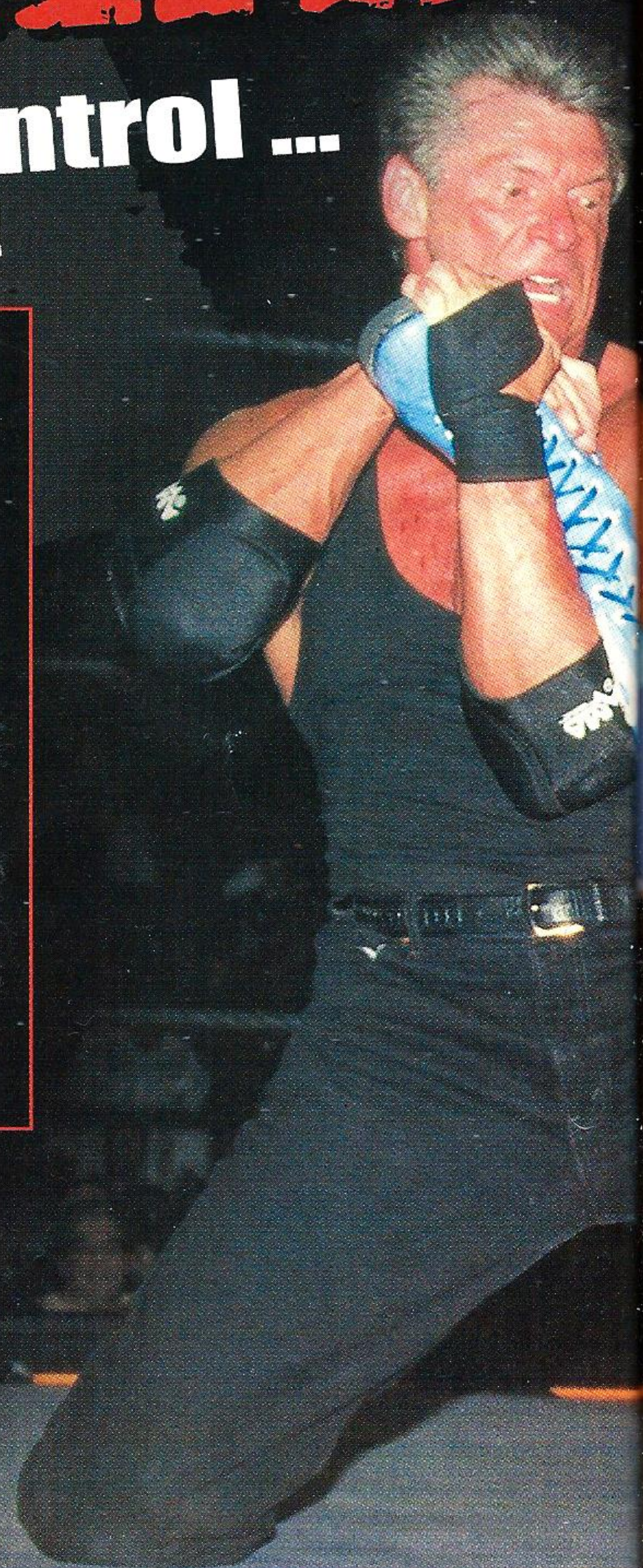
WAR GAMES!

**WWE Is Out Of Control ...
And Vinnie Mac Loves It!**



The stormy on-air relationship between Stephanie McMahon and Triple-H came back to haunt her soon after she was given control of *Smackdown* as GM. When all superstars were offered the chance to sign with either show, "The Game" became the first to jump. He crossed over to the *Raw* side and made a deal with Eric Bischoff.

The war between Vince McMahon and Ric Flair was compelling before the brand extension, but it was almost non-existent once the WWE roster split. Then, just two months after Flair took control of *Raw* and Vince got *Smackdown*, McMahon beat the "Nature Boy" in a hastily arranged match to regain full control of WWE ... and it was on to plan B.



Section compiled by Will Welsh

WHEN VINCE McMAHON handed over control of *Raw* to Eric Bischoff and control of *Smackdown* to his daughter, Stephanie, it was a move designed to spur competition between the two brands, something that had been lacking ever since WWE split in half way back in April. There might have been occasional jabs between the announce teams here and there, but the rivalry (if you even want to call it that) was practically nonexistent. *Raw* wrestlers and officials and *Smackdown* wrestlers and officials were happy to exist in their own little never-never lands, only too happy to catch up with each other at WWE's monthly pay-per-views.

Such actions do not make for the most compelling television, and there's no doubt that Vince McMahon had other things in mind when he originally went ahead with the brand extension. He probably envisioned *Raw* and *Smackdown* as bloody battlefields on which the wrestlers not only competed for the top spots in their respective divisions, but also fought for brand pride. If anyone from the other side even thought about soiling the good name of their brand, either in the ring or on the microphone, a heavy price would be paid come pay-per-view time.

Of course, much of the fault for the lack of any rivalry between *Raw* and *Smackdown* in the early days of the brand extension must be placed at the feet of McMahon himself. Instead of looking to make *Smackdown* a better program than *Raw*, McMahon, as owner of the Thursday night show, fed his ego by putting himself into a feud with Triple-H. Over on *Raw*, that program's owner at the time, Ric Flair, joined forces with the New World Order to gang up on "Stone-

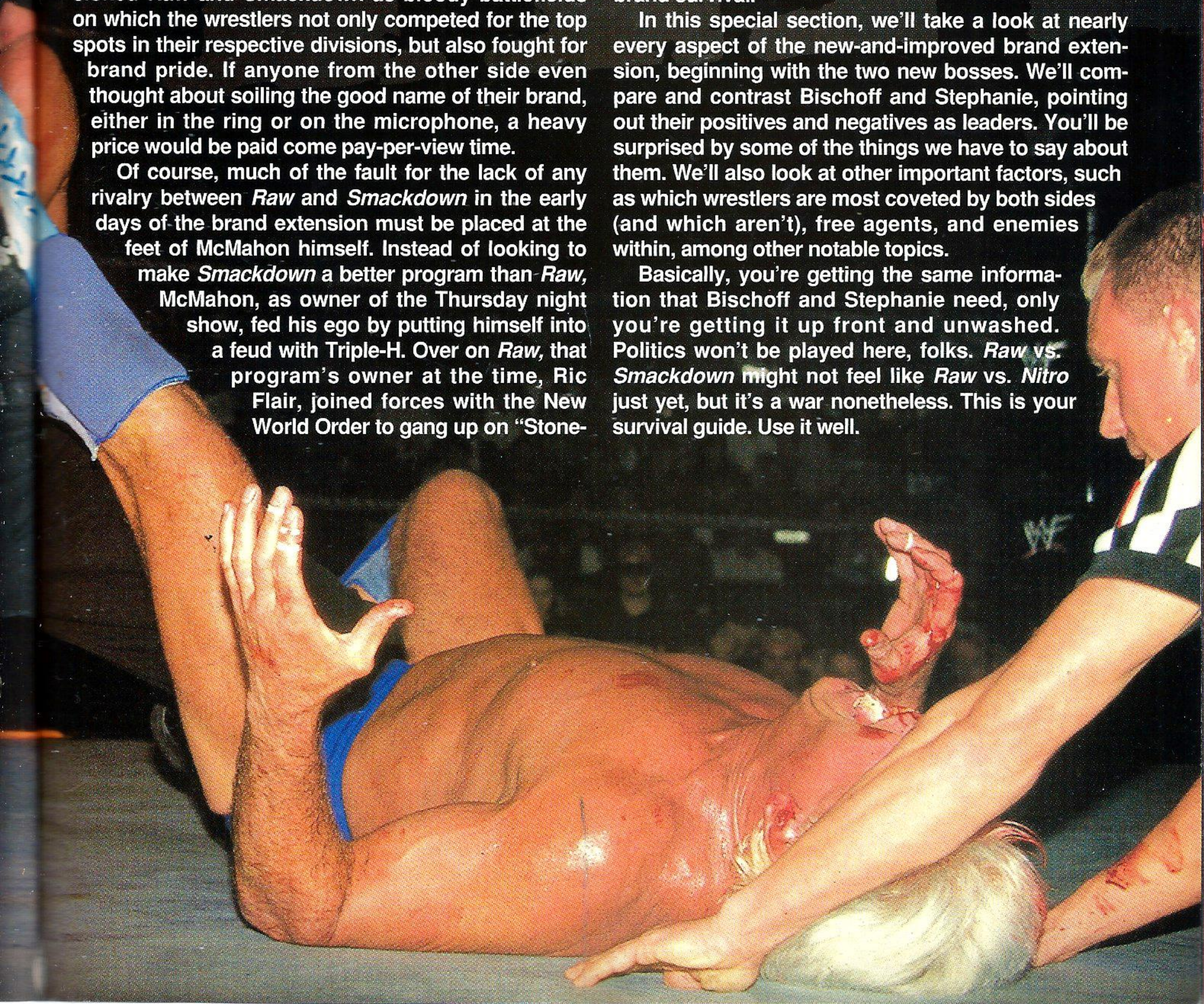
Cold" Steve Austin. It was evil *Raw* owner vs. top star and evil *Smackdown* owner vs. top star at the same time. Within weeks, McMahon and Flair had seemingly forgotten about the other's brand and concentrated on making life miserable for their top stars, and the rivalry cooled down. Before we knew it, it had become a sideshow novelty.

Not anymore. Bischoff and Stephanie have grabbed their respective brands by the throat, all while trying to choke the life out of the other's brand by stealing (within just a few weeks) top names such as Triple-H, Brock Lesnar, Chris Jericho, Chris Benoit, Eddie Guerrero, and The Un-Americans. Before Bischoff and Steph took over, trades were only rumors, and signing away the other brand's talent wasn't even an option.

It's not only an option now—it's a necessary evil of brand survival.

In this special section, we'll take a look at nearly every aspect of the new-and-improved brand extension, beginning with the two new bosses. We'll compare and contrast Bischoff and Stephanie, pointing out their positives and negatives as leaders. You'll be surprised by some of the things we have to say about them. We'll also look at other important factors, such as which wrestlers are most coveted by both sides (and which aren't), free agents, and enemies within, among other notable topics.

Basically, you're getting the same information that Bischoff and Stephanie need, only you're getting it up front and unwashed. Politics won't be played here, folks. *Raw* vs. *Smackdown* might not feel like *Raw* vs. *Nitro* just yet, but it's a war nonetheless. This is your survival guide. Use it well.



THE BISCH IS BACK

Watching Eric Bischoff walk out on *Raw* and hug Vince McMahon was one of wrestling's most surreal moments ever. Three or four years ago, such a notion was unthinkable. A courtroom seemed to be their only hope for a meeting. Now they're working together, and everybody wants to know what brought Bischoff back.

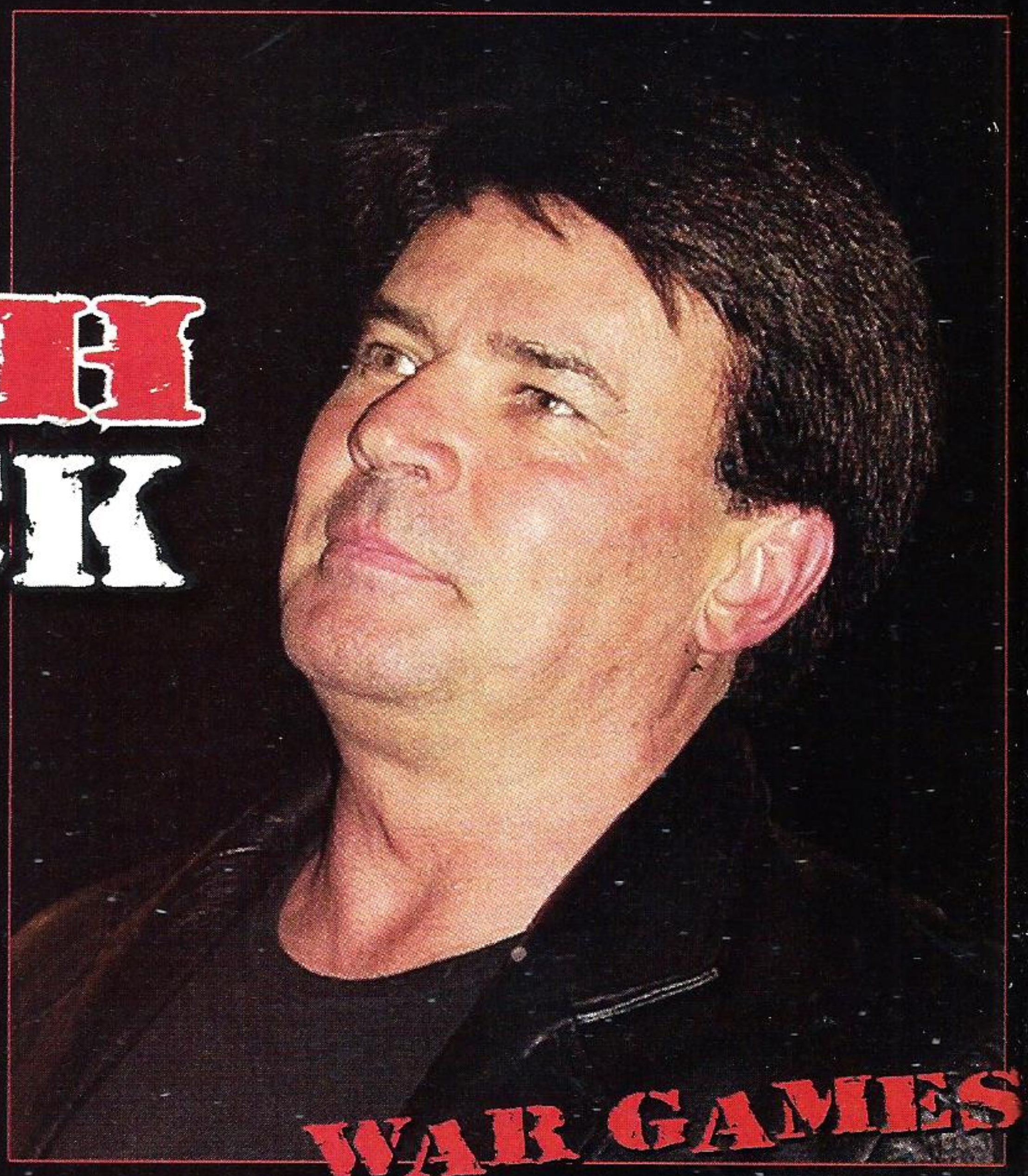
Redemption. That's what Bischoff's after, isn't it? After failing to keep WCW from running deep in the red and later losing his bid to purchase WCW and run it free of Time Warner's corporate handcuffs, Bischoff wants to prove that he is, indeed, one of the greatest wrestling minds of the last 20 years. Doing his part to make *Raw* a successful stand-alone brand would do just that.

It's going to take some work. Just like any general manager in any corporate endeavor, Bischoff has some strengths and some weaknesses. If he's to succeed, he must play to his strengths:

•**GAMBLIN' MAN.** Bischoff convinced Ted Turner to let him produce a prime time program—*Nitro*—to go head-to-head with *Raw*. It turned out to be a brilliant move. He gave cruiserweights a chance when almost nobody else would. He befriended controversial stars such as Dennis Rodman and mainstream icons such as Jay Leno and put them in actual wrestling matches. He isn't afraid to take chances with anything or anyone.

•**EASY E.** Bischoff is one of the greatest villains to ever step inside a wrestling ring. Wrestling fans don't just dislike the guy; they absolutely loathe him. That kind of passion can't be manufactured, and if used properly, it's a great asset.

•**EXPERIENCE.** Some might wonder why McMahon would entrust WWE's flagship show to a man who failed to keep WCW solvent. It's easy. At first, Bischoff succeeded on a grand scale. Failure came much later. Now he has more knowledge on what works and doesn't work, probably more



knowledge than any other wrestling executive in history.

Of course, Bischoff has his drawbacks, too. And they're no small potatoes:

•**ACCOUNTABILITY.** WCW became a success under Bischoff partly because he had the combination to Time Warner's vault. Because he wasn't using his own money, Bischoff spent and spent and spent to try to find something that would work big. He doesn't have as much freedom in WWE, and he must answer to Vince. Can he produce quickly—and under pressure?

•**RELATIONSHIPS.** During his run as president of WCW, Bischoff ticked off a whole lot of people who now work in WWE, and they might not prove too friendly when they see him in the halls. A backstabbing assassin (or two or three) is probably on the prowl.

•**HUMBLE PIE.** When WCW was on top, Bischoff was an egomaniacal monster who wouldn't hesitate to hurt WWE in any way possible, including giving away the results of pretaped *Raws* on *Nitro*. His failure to disclose the results of the August 8 episode of *Smackdown*, which was taped on Sunday, August 4 (one night before *Raw* aired live) indicates that Bischoff might have lost some of his fabled mercilessness.

Bischoff can lead *Raw* to greatness, and if he learned his lessons well, he'll do just that.

THE BITCH IS BACK

Just like Bischoff, Stephanie McMahon isn't well-loved. If the fans aren't calling her a bitch, they're calling her that "s" word that isn't fit for publication. They're having trouble believing that she truly wants to lead one of her father's wrestling brands, *WWE Smackdown*, to glory and do right by WWE fans everywhere. They believe she has a sinister ulterior motive.

Of course they do. This is the same Stephanie who bought ECW and joined her brother, Shane, in sparking a revolution that nearly tore WWE apart. The Alliance invasion eventually proved fruitless, but during it, Stephanie showed the world what she's made of. (Hint: It's the stuff that'll get you coal in your stocking come Christmas.)

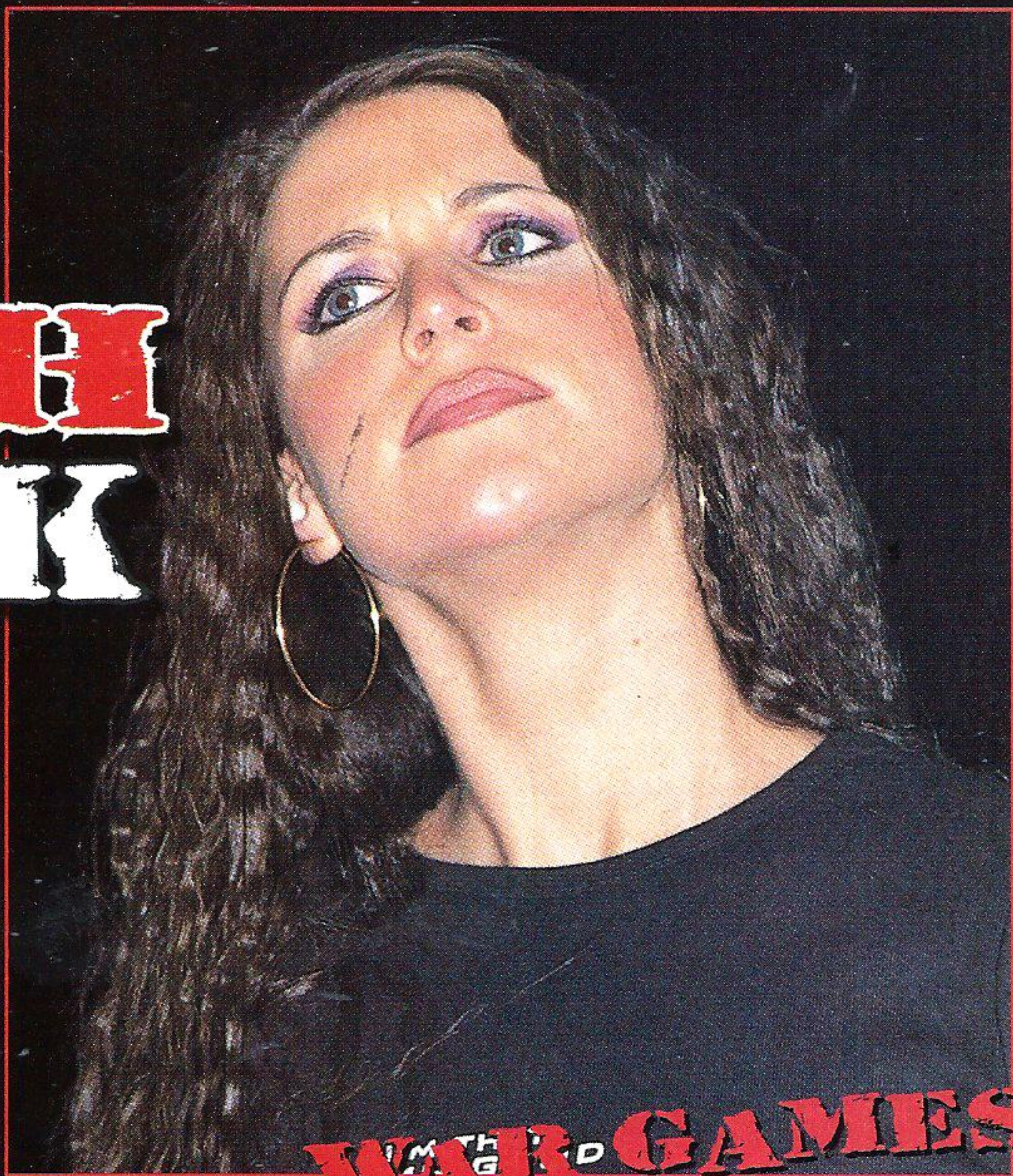
Stephanie, though, is a savvy businesswoman, and she's full of ruthless aggression. She knows what she's doing behind the scenes better than most. And if Vince was going to hire Bischoff to head up *Raw*, forgiving and hiring Stephanie must have seemed easy in comparison.

Here's a quick look at Steph's strengths:

•**RUTHLESSNESS.** Like Bischoff, Stephanie will do anything to succeed. Though she may paint herself to be the picture of morality nowadays, she's nothing of the sort. She's conniving and deceitful, and she'll lie to you as soon as look at you. In other words, she's a McMahon and everything a wrestling executive needs to be.

•**DADDY'S LITTLE GIRL.** After watching Steph try to destroy WWE from the inside, only to be named *Smackdown*'s general manager a few months later, we don't think there's anything that she could do that would prevent Vince from eventually forgiving her. This gives her a lot of leeway in terms of the direction she wants to take *Smackdown*.

•**PLAYS THE GAME.** Nope, we're not talking about Triple-H here. Because Steph's born and



WAR GAMES

bred WWE, she knows how to play the game by WWE's rules. This puts her at a distinct advantage over Bischoff, who is an outsider and an untrustworthy one at that.

We all know that Steph has her drawbacks. Here are her three most prominent:

•**MISS INFALLIBLE.** Steph isn't one for taking advice. According to "The Billion-Dollar Princess," her way is the right way and only way. If you have a problem with that, she'll point you to the highway. Steph needs to learn that she can be wrong and that the opinions of others can be valuable.

•**DADDY'S LITTLE GIRL.** Yup, it's a positive and a negative. Steph might get everything she wants from Vince, but the relationship hurts her in the eyes of other WWE officials. They ask, "Did she earn her spot? Or is this just nepotism at work here?" She needs to earn respect on her own.

•**PLAYED "THE GAME."** Now we're talking about Triple-H. When Stephanie hooked up with Helmsley and seemingly fell for Kurt Angle, she alerted possible enemies to a weakness: She will get personally involved with the talent if it helps her further her agenda. That leaves her open to all kinds of schemes.

Steph has a large challenge in front of her, and competing with Bischoff will make it that much harder. However, if she's Vince McMahon's daughter (and she is), she should be more than up for the challenge.

Now it really begins. We've just covered the two new bosses. We broke down their respective talents and let you know who's ahead of the curve in what areas and who's deficient in others. Now comes the hard part. Analyzing Bischoff and Stephanie on their own merits is one thing. Now we have to take into consideration the way WWE's wrestlers will deal with them. Some will be nice, and some won't be so nice. Chris Jericho or Justin Credible might favor one and not the other. The same goes for Triple-H and Billy Kidman. Who respects whom has suddenly become paramount, because if Bischoff and Stephanie are going to succeed, they'll need the help of everyone underneath them. Let's begin with the wrestlers most coveted by both sides ...

THE HOT COMMODITIES

There are so many of them, aren't there? It seems like everyone on WWE's roster is someone these days—that's how strong WWE's overall talent lineup is.

The bidding war for talent began with Triple-H, and to say that both sides wanted his services would be an understatement. He might not be the most popular wrestler in WWE history, but Triple-H is the best at what he does. He's a consummate professional, and he goes about his business like a man determined to get exactly what he wants no later than yesterday. *Raw* and *Smackdown* would both be better with him on the roster; Bischoff is lucky Shawn

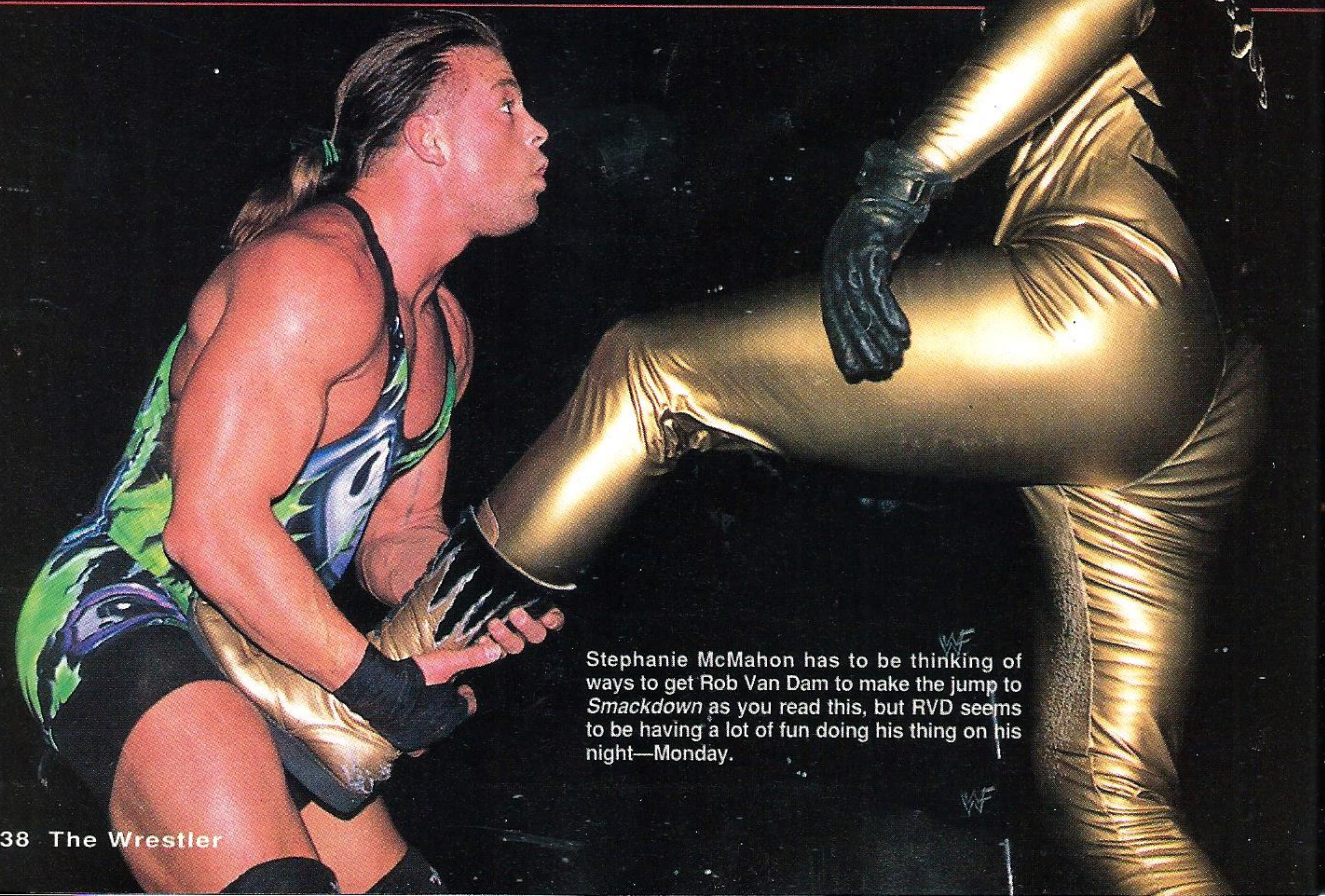
Michaels lured "The Game" over to the *Raw* side before things got ugly between the two of them.

Others to jump early were Brock Lesnar, Chris Jericho, Chris Benoit, Eddie Guerrero, Stacy Keibler, and The Un-Americans, and since they did jump early (it was obvious that the side each went to wanted his or her services), we'll refrain from discussing them.

Looking at the rest of the roster, Rob Van Dam is probably the most sought-after wrestler. At press time, he was reportedly high on Stephanie's must-have list, but he seemed content to remain on *Raw*. That makes sense. For years, RVD used the nickname of "Mr. Monday Night." Now that he's finally made it to Monday night, wouldn't it be silly of him to jump to the Thursday show, *Smackdown*? It's kind of a silly argument for his continued presence on *Raw*, but Van Dam probably doesn't think so.

What about Kurt Angle? When Steph found out he was talking to "Eric" one night, she pitched a voice-mail fit. Fortunately for her, Angle was talking to his brother Eric, not Eric Bischoff. Stephanie desperately wants to keep Angle on *Smackdown*. Not only has she had interest in Angle in the past, he also complements Benoit and Guerrero quite nicely. They're the three best pure wrestlers on the entire WWE roster, and for now, Steph can say that she has them all on *Smackdown*. Those are some serious bragging rights.

WAR GAMES WAR GAMES WAR GAMES



Stephanie McMahon has to be thinking of ways to get Rob Van Dam to make the jump to *Smackdown* as you read this, but RVD seems to be having a lot of fun doing his thing on his night—Monday.

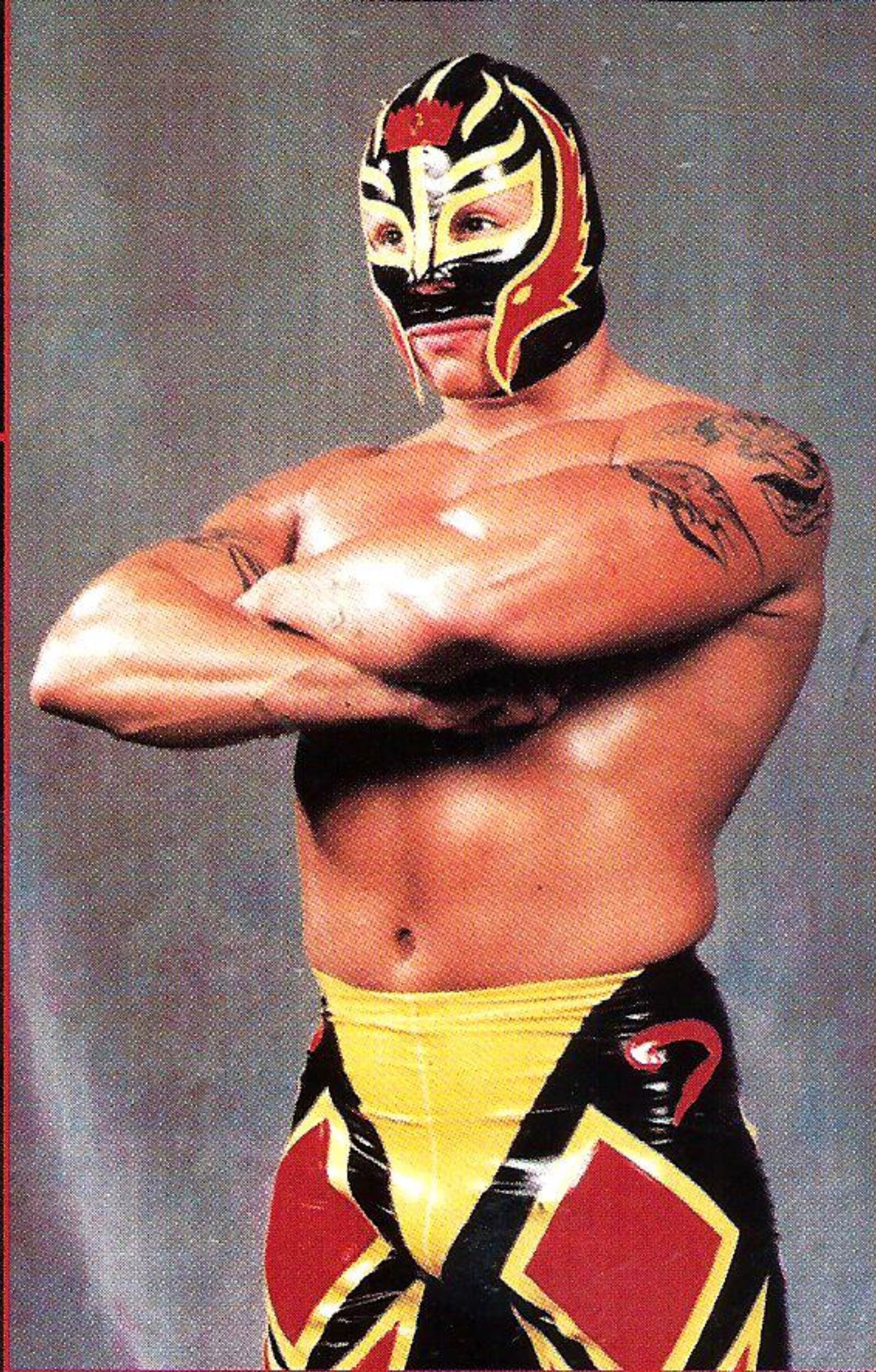
Rey Misterio Jr. was a hot commodity even before he made his debut on WWE TV—on Smackdown. Getting him to make the jump to *Raw* (which doesn't feature any cruiserweight action) would be a very tough sell for Eric Bischoff.

WWE newcomer Rey Misterio Jr. is also a highly sought-after commodity, and both Steph and Bischoff both are interested in his services. As of press time, he was still on the *Smackdown* roster, home of the cruiserweight division. Misterio is a perfect fit for the division, and it's hard to imagine him leaving ... except for his past with Bischoff.

Yes, while both were in WCW, Bischoff did have the NWO assault Misterio on a number of occasions.

But Bischoff is also the man who gave Misterio his first prime-time break, and Misterio definitely remembers that.

Rey-Rey will probably remain a *Smackdown* wrestler just because of the cruiserweight division,



stir up controversy at a moment's notice, and he's so respected (and feared) that he could organize a revolt against either one of the GMs at any time. He's popular with the fans, but, realistically, he's too much for either GM to handle.

For similar reasons, Ric Flair is a WWE talent that we're sure both GMs would like to see on the other's roster. Flair is *the* most respected wrestler on either side. He might have been the dirtiest player in the game for much of his career, but he was one of the best to ever play the game, too. And if you believe that his younger, more nimble brethren don't know that and look to him for advice, you're dead wrong.

About half of WWE's roster would likely follow his lead were he to stage an uprising, and that's a number that would be daunting for either boss to try to handle.

Bischoff, because of his history with Flair in WCW, might want even less to do with him than Stephanie, but neither GM is excited about seeing Flair's face in the locker room.

AMES WAR GAME WAR GAMES

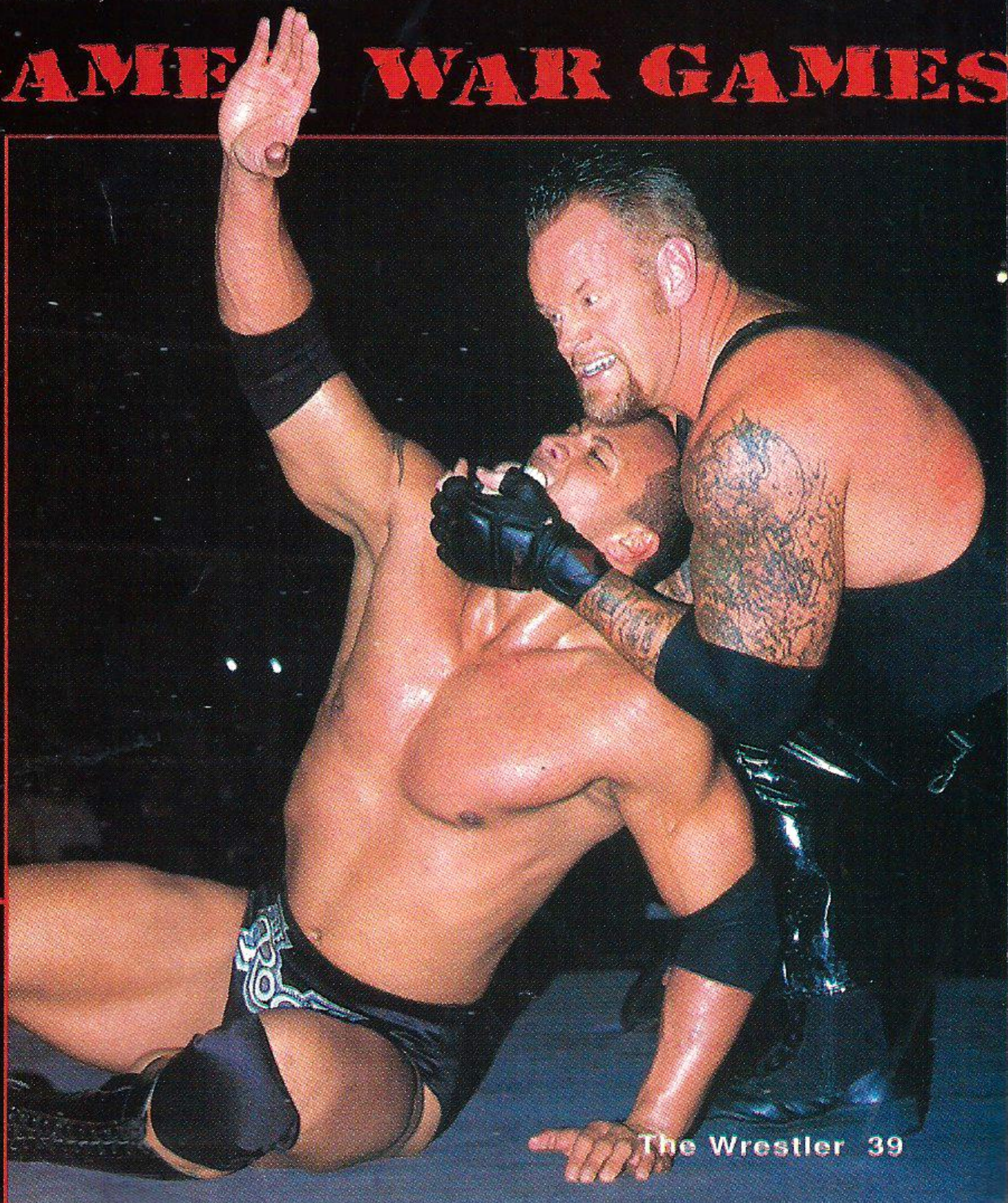
but we wouldn't be totally stunned to see the high-flyer jump to *Raw*, either.

THE SUPERSTARS YOU DON'T WANT

Just as there are superstars that both Bischoff and Stephanie want, there are also wrestlers whom they won't go out of their way to sign or retain, first among them being The Undertaker.

Why 'Taker? This answer is simple. 'Taker does what he wants when he wants to do it. He doesn't kowtow or buckle to any man (or woman) and prides himself on thumbing his nose at authority. Bischoff and Stephanie are control freaks. They want their employees to do what they say at all times. 'Taker simply doesn't fit that bill, and because of that, he can be a locker room wildcard. He's able to

The Undertaker may be past his prime, but he has had a great run in WWE recently. That doesn't mean Eric or Stephanie has made getting him under contract and/or keeping him under contract a top priority.



Then there's Hulk Hogan. Believe it or not, and we know you might have a hard time believing it, there's no way that Stephanie wants any part of the red and yellow on *Smackdown*. As surprising as this is, neither does Bischoff, despite their long-standing friendship, which goes back to their days in WCW. Hogan is wrestling's biggest name, and if anyone in the history of the business can be labeled an icon, that man is Hogan. His name will be remembered decades from now, and his rise to fame will be discussed by generations of fans. But he's way past his prime. He may draw big pops, but his matches are slow and plodding, and they temper momentum during live events. Plus, as long as Hogan remains on the WWE roster, he's taking up a main-event slot that could go to a deserving guy like Edge.

And let's not forget about everyone's favorite redheaded stepchild, Raven. Now, let us make it clear that that we're not saying that the GMs should avoid him, because we think he'd be a fine addition to either roster; we've always thought that he's an unappreciated talent in need of

a legitimate chance to prove himself. Apparently, though, we're the only ones to hold that opinion. Raven's stuck on *Heat*, and Bischoff and Stephanie haven't shown any interest in his talents. We don't think he's going to escape that purgatory anytime soon. He's known as a bit of a malcontent.

PLAYERS WHO KNOW THEIR ROLE

Every wrestling organization needs "good hands," as good-ol' Jim Ross likes to put it. They're the wrestlers who know they aren't going to be the star of anybody's show, yet they show up week after week and put forward one solid effort after another. The fans often overlook these kinds of wrestlers, but they're absolutely essential to a promotion's overall success.

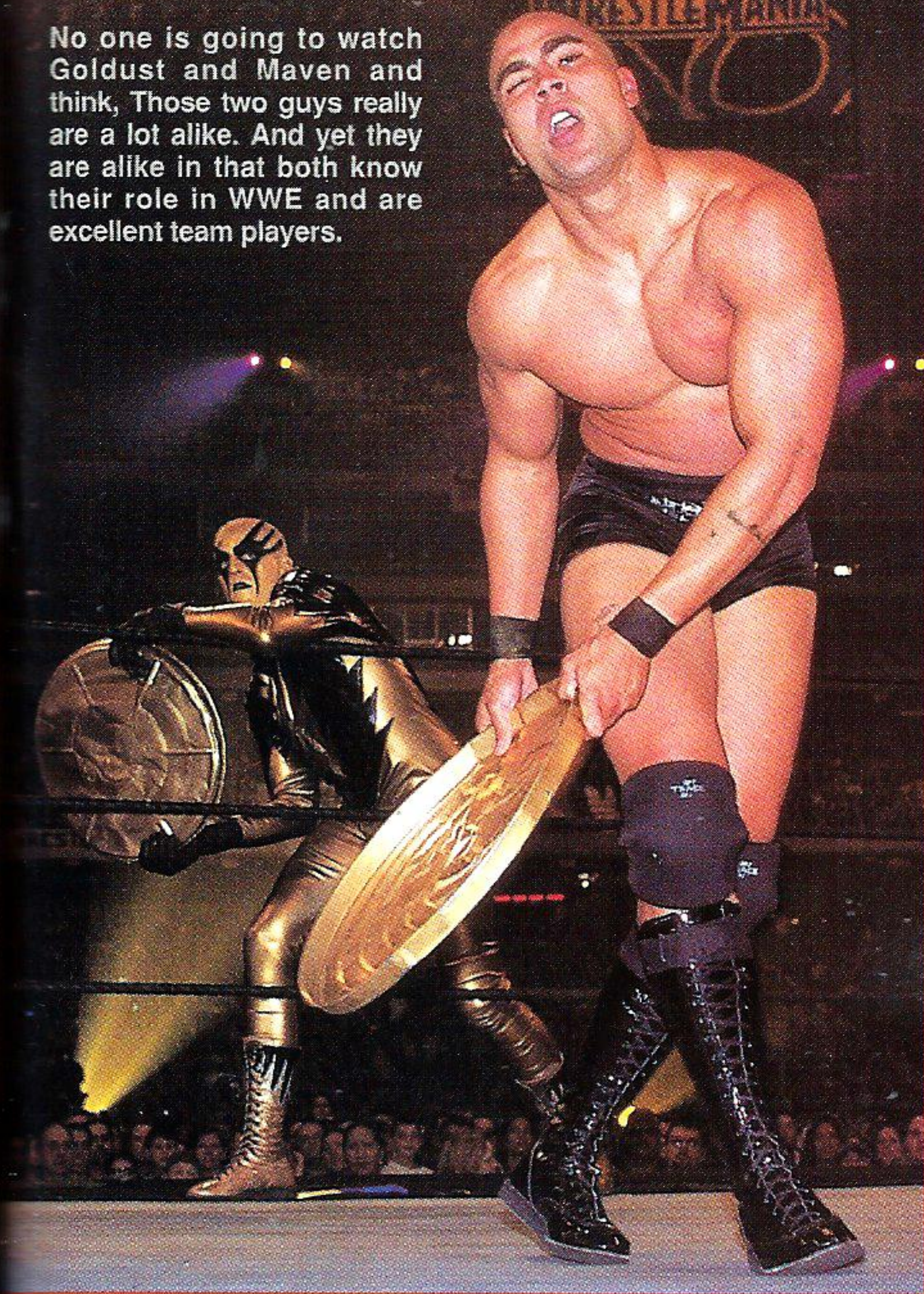
Even though he's pretty close to the top of the card, Goldust belongs in this category. The golden one is never going to be the undisputed WWE World heavyweight champion, and he'll be lucky if he ever wears that Intercontinental title again, but he's still a vital cog in WWE's overall game plan. He's no longer the shocking character he was in 1996, but he does provide *Raw* with a strong comedic presence, and because Goldust does know his role, he tries to make sure that all fans are red-faced with laughter at the end of every one of his segments. And remember, he does this knowing that the silly persona he's portraying today will make it terribly difficult for him to be regarded as a serious wrestler ever again.

That's sacrifice, and that's what this category is all about.

Former ECW World champion Tommy Dreamer also fits the bill. "The Innovator Of Violence" has taken some of the most horrific bumps in the history of the sport and sacrificed his body too many times over the years. Like Goldust, Dreamer knows he's never going to be the Intercontinental or World champion. And just like Goldust, he doesn't care. He's so ecstatic to be in WWE that he'll pretty much do anything to remain a part of the organization, which is one of the reasons he went out on

Ric Flair has earned the respect of everyone in the WWE locker room many times over. That fact alone might make both WWE GMs a bit wary of him.

No one is going to watch Goldust and Maven and think, Those two guys really are a lot alike. And yet they are alike in that both know their role in WWE and are excellent team players.



If every wrestler on WWE's roster wrestled with Maven's exuberance, the promotion would be so much better for it.

THE FREE AGENT FACTOR

Right now, there are more big-name wrestlers on the market than ever before. If you're lucky, you're able to catch Buff Bagwell, Shane Douglas, Sabu, or any of the other former WCW and ECW stars not currently employed by WWE at an indy show near you. In fact, there are so many big names on the market that not all of them land regular independent dates. Basically, there are way too many pegs for the number of holes that need to be filled.

And, to be quite honest, we don't think that Bischoff and Stephanie are looking in the classic free agent marketplace. Nor should they. With the exception of a select few free agents (Scott Steiner, Goldberg, and Sting, most notably), most of the wrestlers who once headlined shows for WCW or ECW are not under the employ of WWE for a reason. Either they're too old, too expensive, too injury-prone, or a combination of all three. Bischoff and Steph want nothing to do with them.

The free agents that we're talking about are of the more interesting sort. Over the past year, WWE has scaled back its developmental roster significantly. All the rest were reluctantly trimmed for budgetary reasons.

The two GMs would be smart to review the long

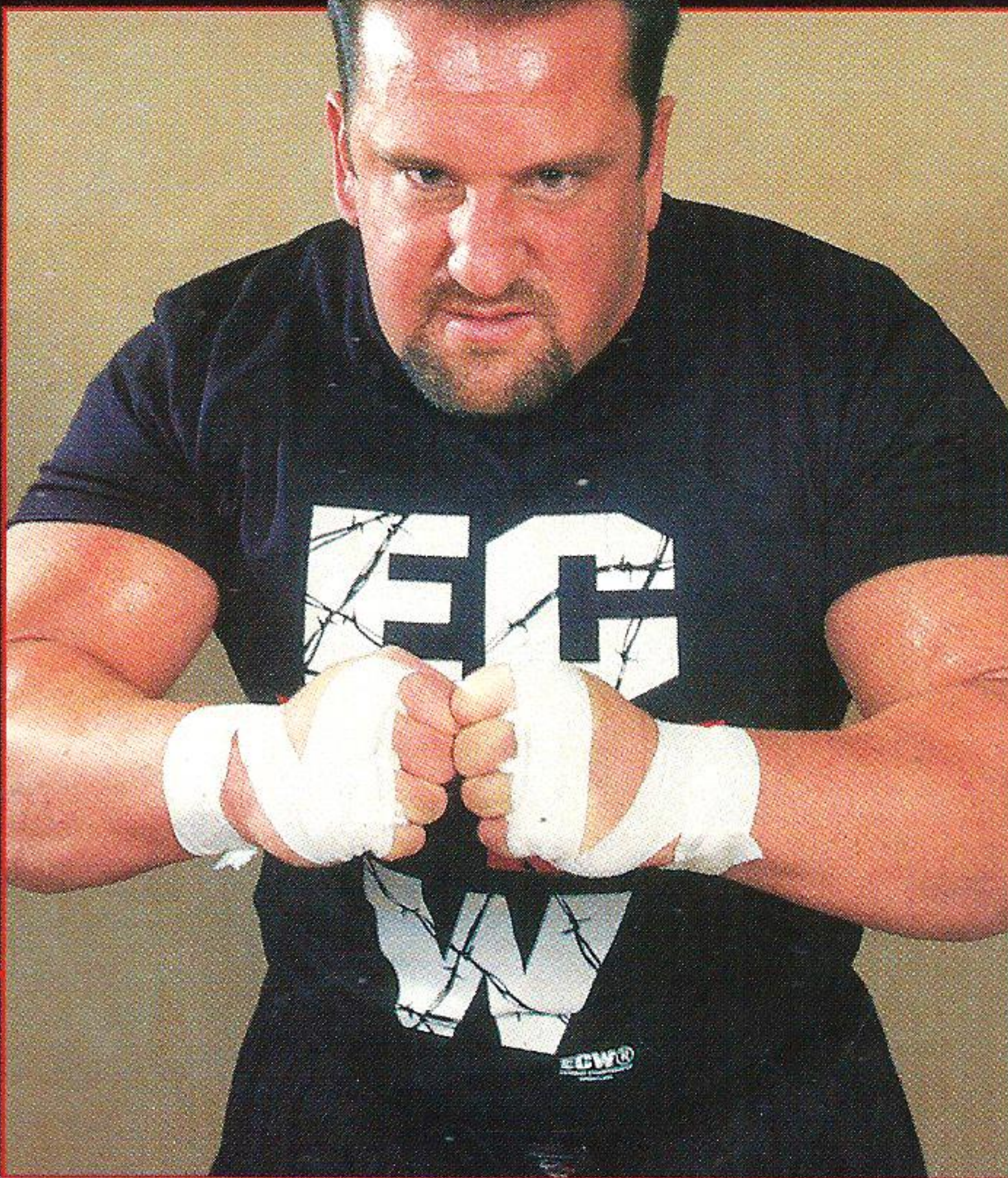
GAMES WAR GAMES GAMES

Raw and swallowed a cup of The Undertaker's chaw. That kind of loyalty is rare.

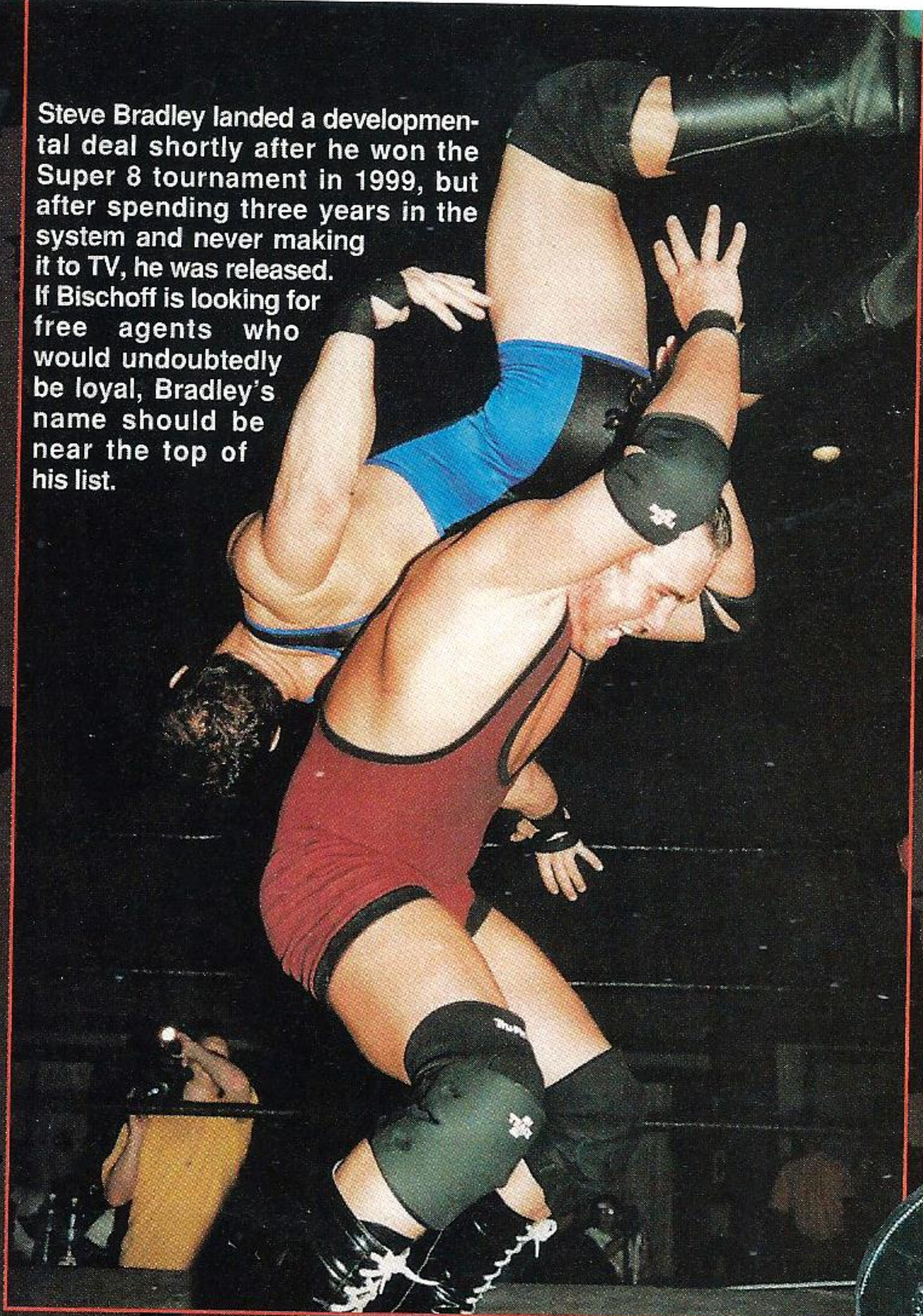
On *Smackdown*, Hardcore Holly shines in his role. Sometimes he's used a lot; other times, months seem to go by between televised Hardcore matches. It doesn't matter. Every time Holly is on WWE TV, he's giving 100 percent—and fans appreciate his no-frills approach. He's become one of WWE's most popular long-time mid-carders ever. Some wrestlers might bristle at such a label, but if we know Hardcore, he's proud to be in that category.

Of course, we can't forget about *Smackdown*'s most famous *Tough Enough* alumnus, Maven, the male *TE1* champ who spent much of the second half of the year out with a broken leg. Despite the fact that he had a relatively easy trek to WWE stardom, other wrestlers should follow his lead. He wrestles every match with an infectious enthusiasm; it's one of the reasons WWE fans have taken to him so quickly.

Long-time ECW fans can tell you all about the sacrifices Tommy Dreamer made for the good of that company. He took wicked bump after wicked bump and always looked out for the younger guys. He's an asset to *Raw* now and could be an asset to *Smackdown* at some point.



Steve Bradley landed a developmental deal shortly after he won the Super 8 tournament in 1999, but after spending three years in the system and never making it to TV, he was released. If Bischoff is looking for free agents who would undoubtedly be loyal, Bradley's name should be near the top of his list.



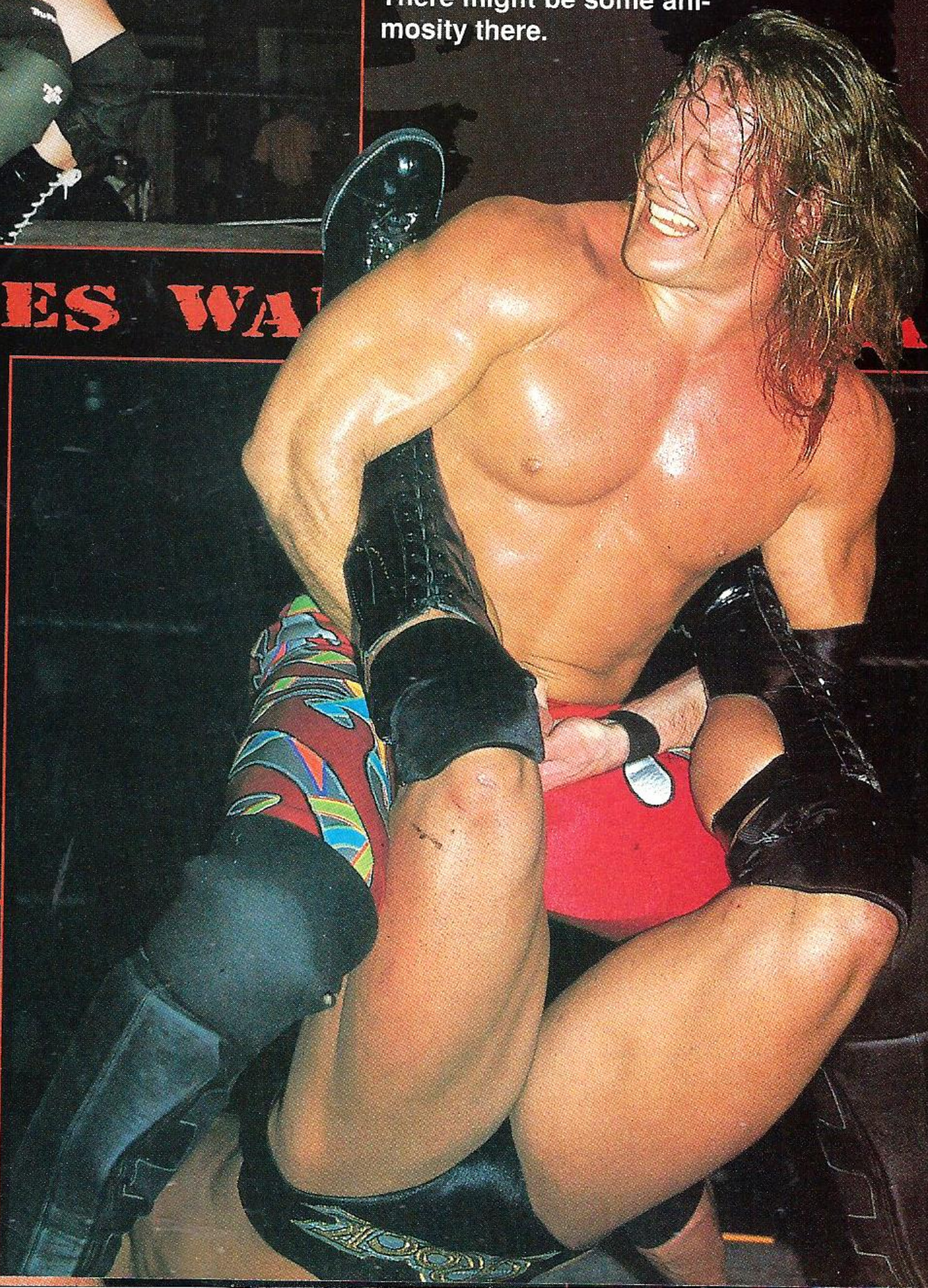
list of cuts and sign some names from there. Say Bischoff offered a spot to Steve Bradley, who was on the WWE developmental roster seemingly forever, endlessly praised by Jim Ross in his weekly "Ross Report" on wwe.com, and yet was the victim of corporate downsizing and cutbacks earlier this year. Don't you think Bradley would become ferociously loyal to Bischoff and break his back to perform for his new boss?

We think he would.

What about Jake and Kenny, the two losing finalists from *Tough Enough 2*? These men have huge problems with WWE. They want to prove that the *Tough Enough* contracts that went to Linda Miles and Jackie Gayda should have gone to them, and there's no better place to do that than in WWE itself. All they need is an opportunity. Bischoff and Stephanie would be wise to sign one or both of these young men. If that happens, Jackie and Linda would be wise to avoid them. There might be some animosity there.

WAR GAMES WAR

What did Chris Jericho do within a day of winning the WCW World title (in WWE) from The Rock last year? He dedicated his win to Eric Bischoff ... in a very insincere way. Bischoff ought to be wondering about the real reason why Y2J jumped to Raw.



THE ENEMIES WITHIN

Bischoff and Stephanie have made a slew of enemies over the years, enemies who are much bigger and stronger than they are. If the two GMs want *Raw* and *Smackdown* to run smoothly, they'll need to avoid the ghosts of their pasts.

It won't be easy.

As president of WCW, Eric Bischoff gave a lot of people reason to hate and resent him. It went with the territory. After all, who else other than the man in charge is a wrestler going to blame if he doesn't get a push? The cameraman? Bischoff made a lot of tough decisions, and those decisions didn't please everyone. By the time he was ousted as president of the company, he was a very unpopular man in the locker room.

Beyond Vince McMahon, Bischoff's biggest enemy during his tenure with WCW was Ric Flair. When both were in WCW, Flair contends that Bischoff tried to destroy his career and ruin his good name, and that only the fans prevented that from happening. The feud was so real and went so far that lawsuits were filed. Now Flair works for the Bischoff brand, and it wouldn't shock us to find out that the "Nature Boy" is devising some plan to scuttle Bischoff's ship. "Easy E" would be smart to trade Flair, but remember, it's not like Stephanie has had an easy time with Flair, either. There's a sordid history there, too.

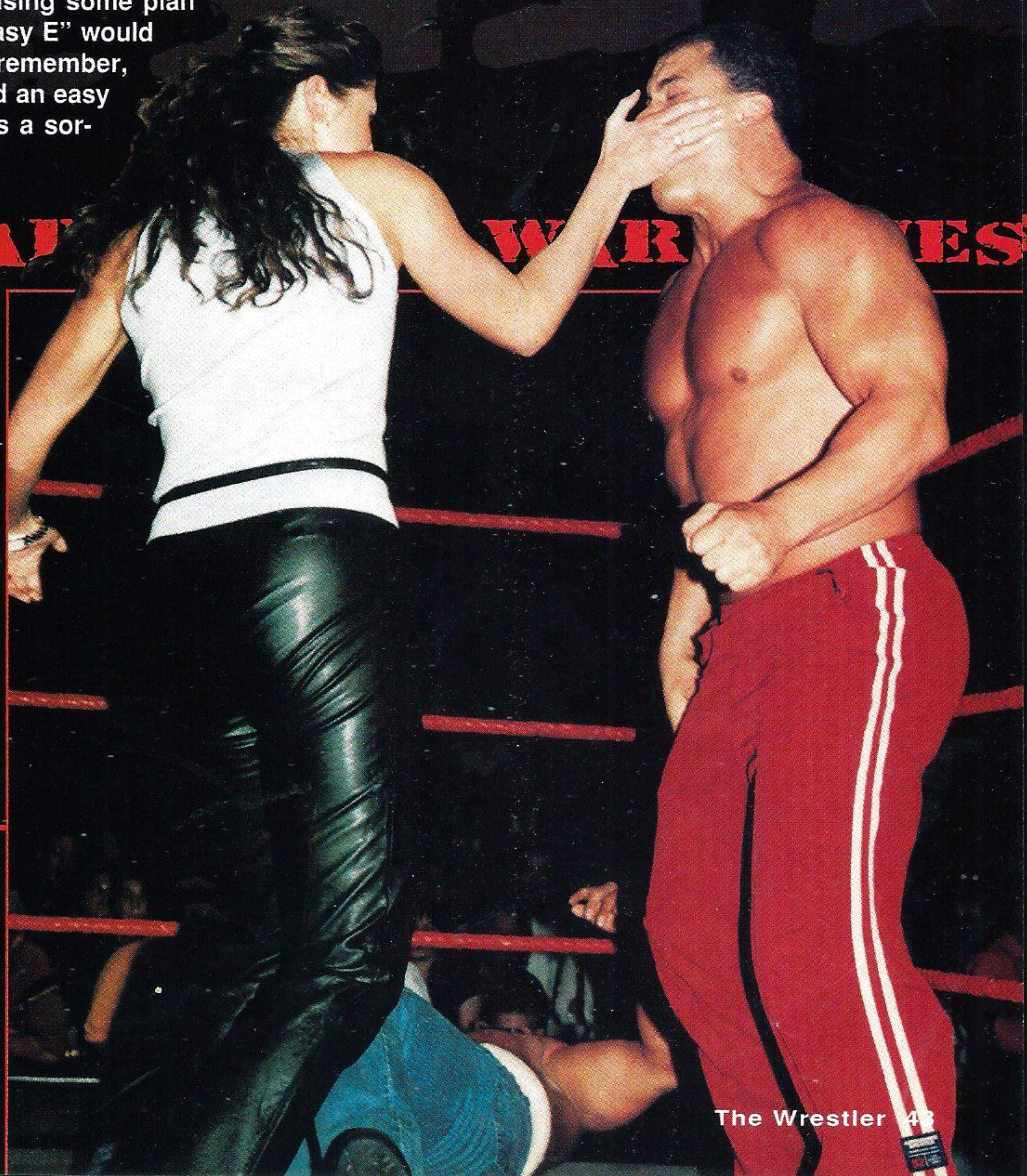
Bischoff also needs to watch out for one of his newest employees, Chris Jericho. Y2J might be calling Bischoff a genius on camera right now, but there's no doubt that Y2J believes Bischoff treated him unfairly in WCW. One day after winning the WCW World title by defeating The Rock at No Mercy 2001, Jericho gave wcw.com the following quote: "First of all, I want to dedicate this victory to Eric Bischoff and

shove it up his ass because he said I could never do it."

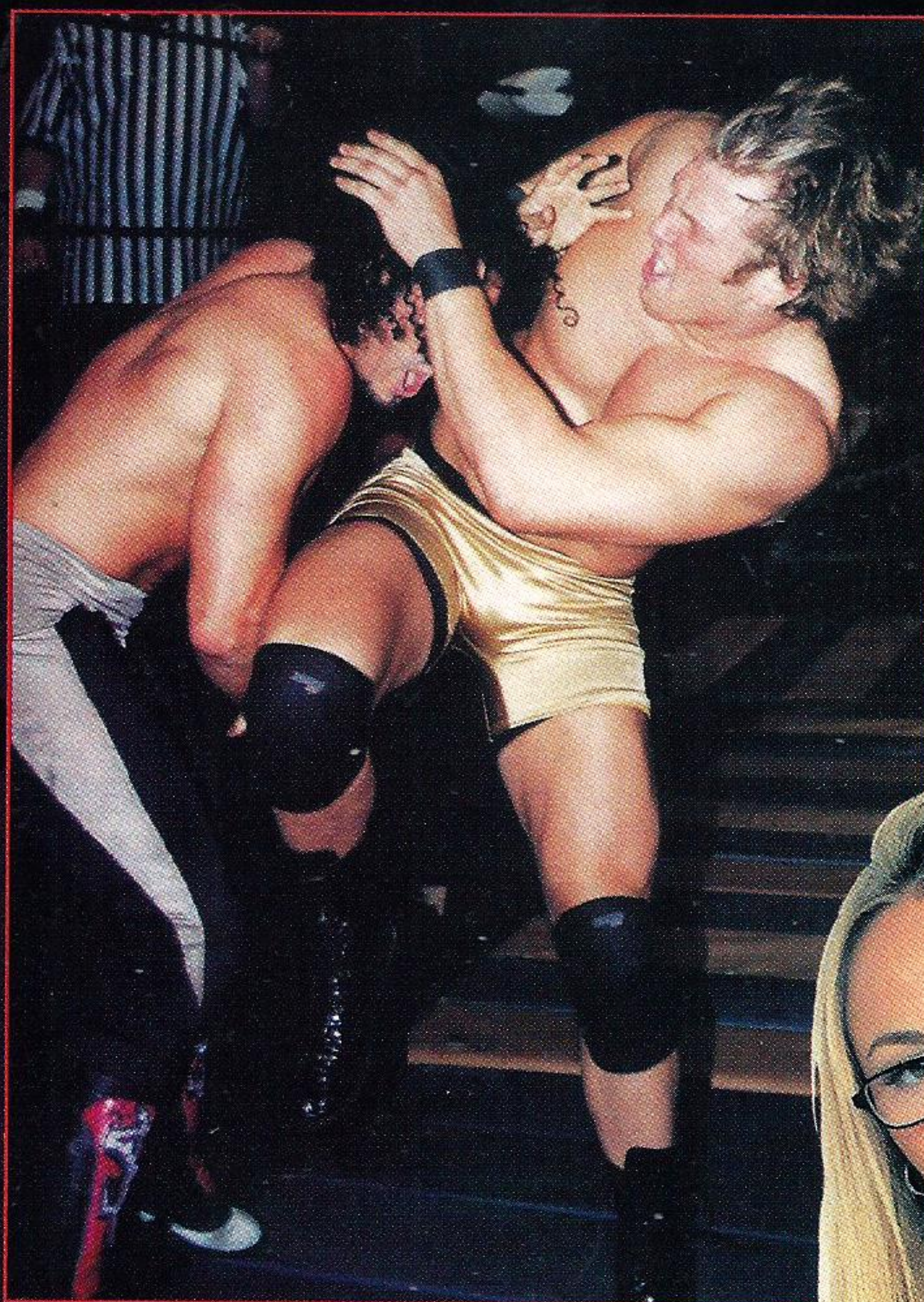
Looking at that quote, it seems strange that Jericho made the jump to *Raw*. Perhaps he's there as a secret agent for Stephanie.

Remember, it was Steph who helped Jericho in his wars with Triple-H over the undisputed WWE World champ earlier this year, so it's not out of the question. Steph's not in the clear, either, however. Looking at the *Smackdown* roster, we have to wonder if Kurt Angle is still so enamored with Vince's little princess. Remember the classic feud that Angle had with Triple-H over Steph's attentions? Steph eventually sided with Helmsley—after playing a game of cat-and-mouse with the former Olympic champion throughout 2000 and into 2001. We have a hard time believing he's forgiven her. Broken hearts don't mend easily.

Because he's so valuable to the brand, Steph can't afford to let Angle get away unless she receives value for value—and that's doubtful because Bischoff knows about the history between the two. That means she needs to keep a close eye on the guy. Angle may be a legitimate Olympic



Stephanie has her own ugly history with some superstars to keep in mind. She and Kurt Angle have been kinda sorta friends recently. The question is, has he forgotten that she ultimately sided with Triple-H over him and made her feelings for him quite clear two years ago?



champion, but we all know that he's no hero. He'd tie up Steph (or anyone else, for that matter) into the anklelock without thinking twice about it.

THE SECOND-IN-COMMANDS

A leader is only as good as those around him. Without being able to fall back on the good advice of trusted confidants, a leader has nowhere to turn and no one he or she can use as a sounding board for ideas. Even the world's greatest generals look to other brilliant military minds for advice once in a while.

As we went to press, Bischoff had just named the leggy Stacy Keibler as his new executive assistant. And while we can understand why Bischoff would make such a decision (note the word "leggy" in the description of Miss Keibler), Keibler wouldn't be ready to run *Raw* should Bischoff have to take a night or two off down the road. Such a scenario would prove catastrophic.

Bischoff, however, does have someone he can turn to, as long as he brings him along slowly. That candidate is a Harvard graduate, no less.

That's right. Bischoff's perfect second-in-command is

WAR GAMES

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Stacy Keibler can look the part of the powerful executive (right) and might make a good executive assistant, but she's not ready to be Bischoff's assistant GM. Our choice for that role is a young man with a brilliant mind that "Easy E" could mold, Harvard's own Christopher Nowinski (above).



none other than the only WWE wrestler ever to graduate from Harvard, *Tough Enough's* Christopher Nowinski.

The idea isn't so strange. Nowinski is a bright guy. You don't graduate from Harvard by sleeping through classes and attending frat parties every night. And because Harvard Chris is at such an early stage in his wrestling career, Bischoff could mold him into the perfect wrestling executive. Bischoff could teach him all the inner workings, introduce him to all the right people, and make him more knowledgeable about the wrestling business

Faarooq is a dark-horse candidate for Steph's second-in-command if there ever was one, but if you check his resume, consider his reputation, and keep in mind that his wrestling days seem to be winding down, it makes a lot of sense.

than even Nowinski thought possible. In return, Nowinski would become a Bischoff disciple—something that Bischoff is in dire need of if he's to survive WWE's politics.

Stephanie needs something a bit different from her second-in-command. Bischoff might look like a scrawny little runt compared to most of the wrestlers that he bosses around, but the guy has a black belt in karate. If it ever came down to it, he could defend himself against a disgruntled employee. That confidence in his ability to defend himself makes it so much easier for him to make unpopular decisions.

Stephanie can't protect herself against such physicality. If an angry wrestler storms into her office, her defense is a swift kick to the family jewels and that's about it. And if she misses, she's in trouble. In other words, Steph needs more brawn than brain in a second in command, although some brain would be nice.

After combing through *Smackdown's* roster three different times, we finally settled on our man: Faarooq.

Damn!

Don't laugh. Really. Did you ever notice that no other wrestlers made fun of Faarooq (or Bradshaw, for that matter) for having an office without walls, but with a door? Even though their ramshackle office was an absolute joke, it was never the butt of one. That's because Faarooq and Bradshaw are two tough hombres. If anyone had ever said a word, it

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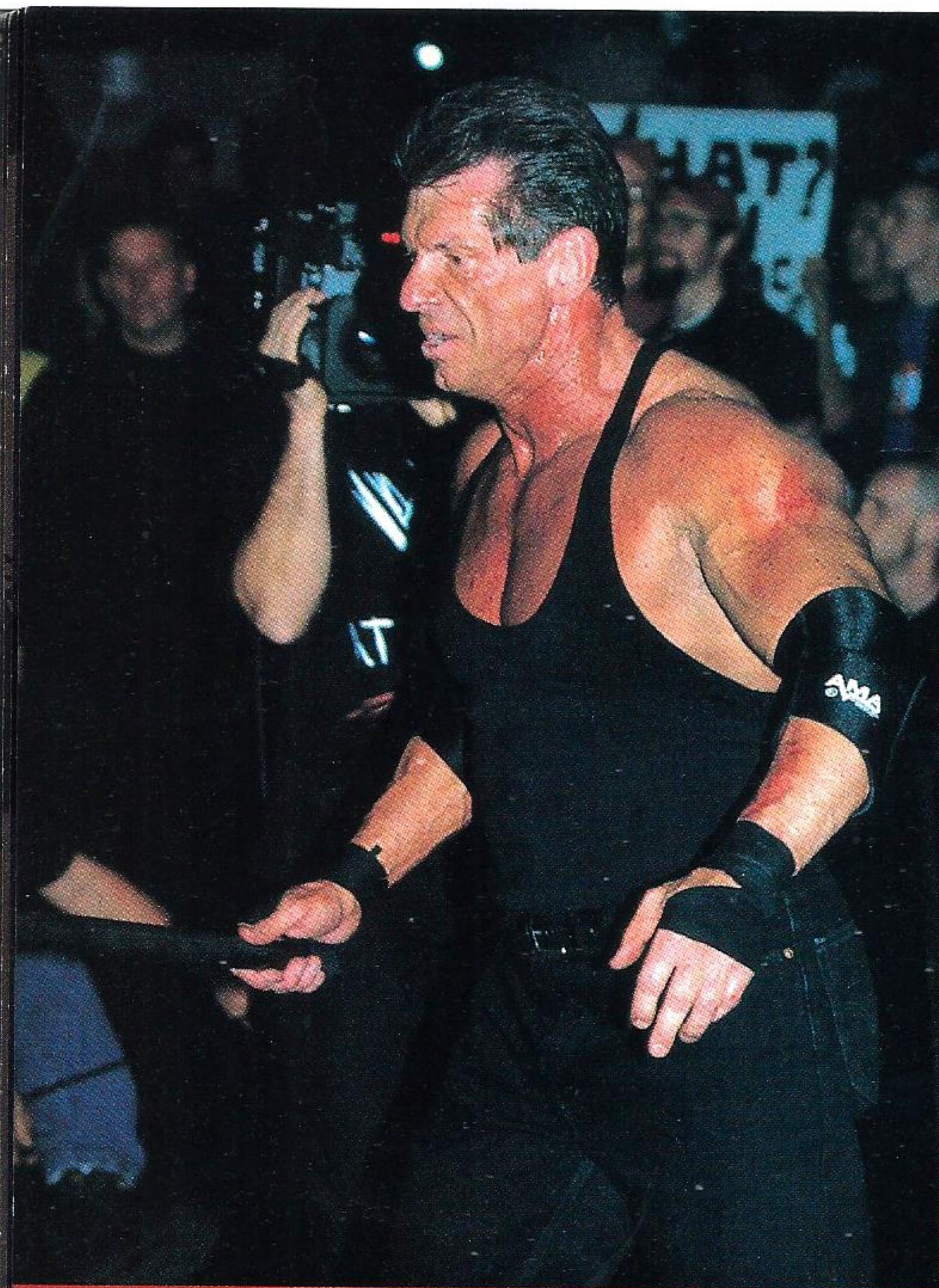
would have been time for a butt-whoopin'.

It's not like Faarooq is just muscle, either. He's a 16-year-veteran of the sport who wrestled in WCW (and was World champion) and ECW before coming to WWE. He understands what works and doesn't work, probably even more so than those people close to him realize. He might not turn out to be the most eloquent executive, but he has the knowledge and the rock-hard fists to fill the position nicely. Taking direction from Stephanie might prove problematic, but considering his lack of TV time of late (he has reportedly told friends he thinks his in-ring days are numbered), we're pretty sure he'd jump at the chance if it was offered to him.

Faarooq's a dark-horse pick for sure, but we're confident that he'd perform his duties more than admirably.

WHERE DOES VINCE FIT IN?

One thing that has gotten lost in the months since Vince McMahon named Bischoff and Stephanie to their respective positions is that, ultimately, Vince still has the final say. He put his full support behind Bischoff and Stephanie and allotted them an enor-



Vince McMahon's reputation has taken quite a few hits over the last two years. That doesn't get him down for long. In fact, he keeps picking himself up and returning to the fight. Expect him to allow this GM war to play out and keep his on-camera involvement to a minimum for quite a while.

we feel he'll probably stand back and let Bischoff and Stephanie hold on to the reigns for a while. The last thing he wants to do is interfere in what looks to be a very entertaining and worthwhile venture, both for WWE and for the fans. There's no money in ruining a good thing just for ego's sake.

Instead, he'll meet with Bischoff and Stephanie on a weekly basis. He'll tell them what he thinks of their respective shows, the good and the bad. And that's all he'll do. If he starts acting too much like the dictator he's been for most of his adult life, his GMs will lose their nerve and start kowtowing to him to get in his good graces. It would strip them of their power and make any salary he pays them to head up the brands wasted money.

Look for him to make occasional appearances, but only to spice things up and increase the competition between the two brands. No matter what anyone says, McMahon is one of the most entertaining figures WWE has, and the fans love his presence on TV. Sometimes, however, it gets to be too much and we all start suffering from McMania. That's usually when it's time for an extended McMahon family vacation at their new vacation home.

Vince will eventually return (probably for a huge

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mous amount of autonomy in their decision-making, but if Vince sees something that's not going his way, he has the authority to power-walk his way down to ringside and right whatever it is he thinks is wrong.

This certainly puts the two GMs in a precarious position. Do they book *Raw* and *Smackdown* in order to suit their own tastes? Or do they book their respective shows in such a manner that they give Vince what he wants first and then what they think is best second?

Let us hope Bischoff and Stephanie are doing what they're doing because they feel it's the right action for their respective shows, not because Vince is watching from above and ready to pass a negative judgment on them if he's not 100 percent pleased. Because if that's the case, Vince might as well take over now and relieve Bischoff and Stephanie of their duties. That way, he can at least get things going in the direction that he wants to take *Raw* and *Smackdown* right away instead of resetting yet again months from now.

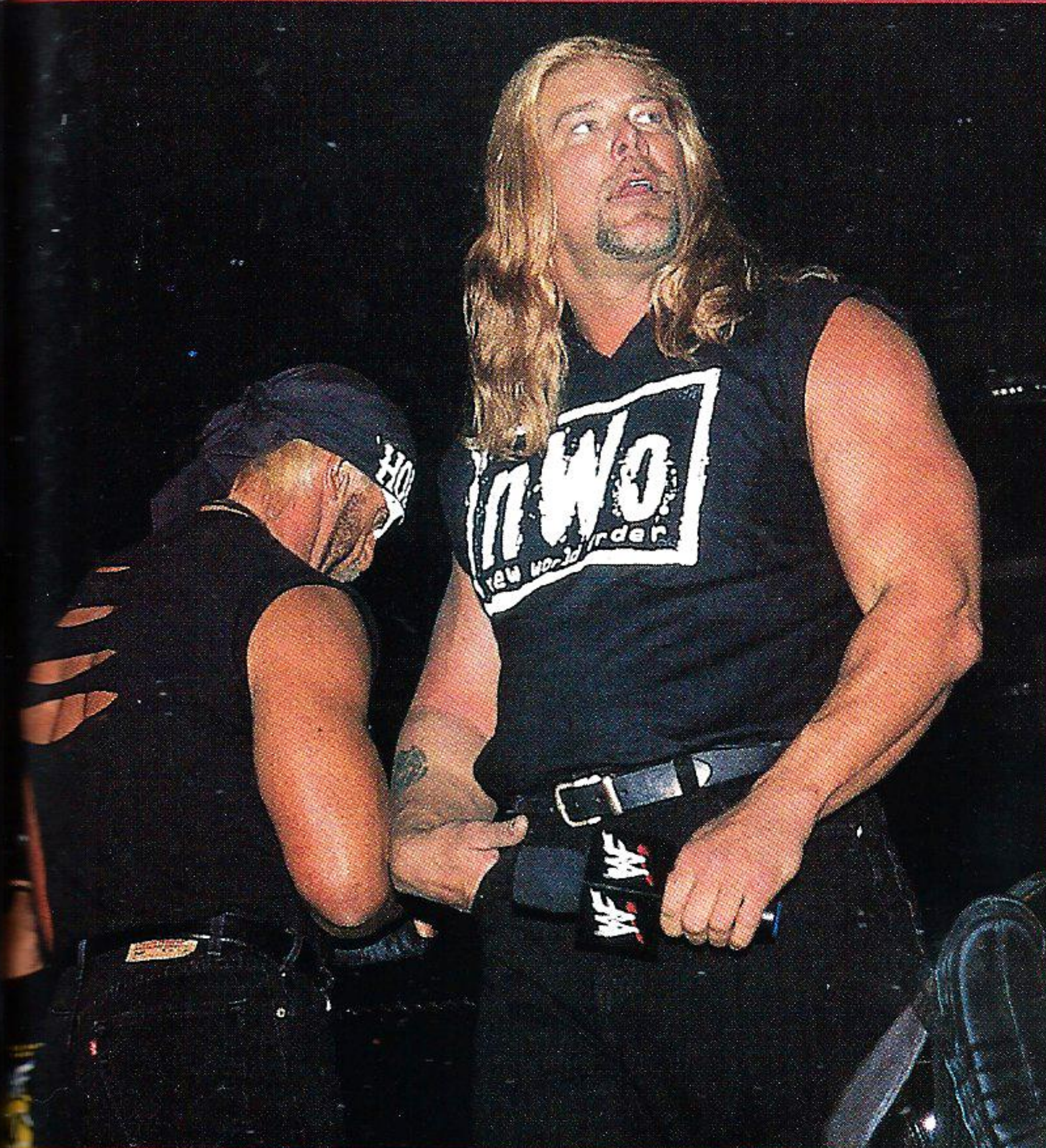
Resetting yet again. Vince McMahon doesn't want to do that. He's started and stopped and started and stopped so many major storylines over the past year that he's close to making Vince Russo's WCW storylines seem like they had continuity. That's why

money-making match against Bischoff), but we doubt he'll be back regularly anytime soon.

WILL THIS STORYLINE LAST?

This is the ultimate question, isn't it? As we said to in the last section, WWE has reset its storylines so often that it's hard to believe that any major company initiative is going to last more than six months. Over the past two years, we've seen WWE buy WCW and start the WCW invasion storyline. When that sputtered, ECW was added to the mix to make it a tad edgier. When the addition of ECW failed to revitalize the invasion storyline for the long term, the invasion idea was scrapped altogether and WWE start over once again. The WWF and WCW world titles were unified, and the WCW name was buried.

Up next came the New World Order. We all know what happened. Within a month, Hulk Hogan became too much of a fan favorite to keep him in a heel group like the NWO. Then Scott Hall was fired. Both roster changes hurt the faction's strength. In the midst of all this, the brand extension was undertaken, with Ric Flair taking charge of *Raw* and Vince



As if the Alliance flop wasn't bad enough, Steve Austin (right) walked out on WWE in June, killing one storyline, then Kevin Nash (above) tore his quad, essentially killing the NWO. WWE really has to give this storyline a chance to work. Does anyone want to see another "reset"?

Bischoff and Stephanie are going to be around for a while is because this version of the brand extension is actually working. Bischoff hasn't been this entertaining in years, and the time away from the TV cameras did Stephanie's character some good.

Watching the two interact has been priceless, and the reviews of both *Raw* and *Smackdown* since they took power have been largely positive.

All kinds of factors could still undo the good that Bischoff and Stephanie have done. If ratings don't go up, it won't matter how good the reviews are—changes will be made. If WWE officials let this project grow, though, it's hard to believe that it won't turn out successful. The experiment is producing some of the best WWE TV we've seen

in a while. It would be a crime to give up on the idea just because ratings fail to skyrocket over night.

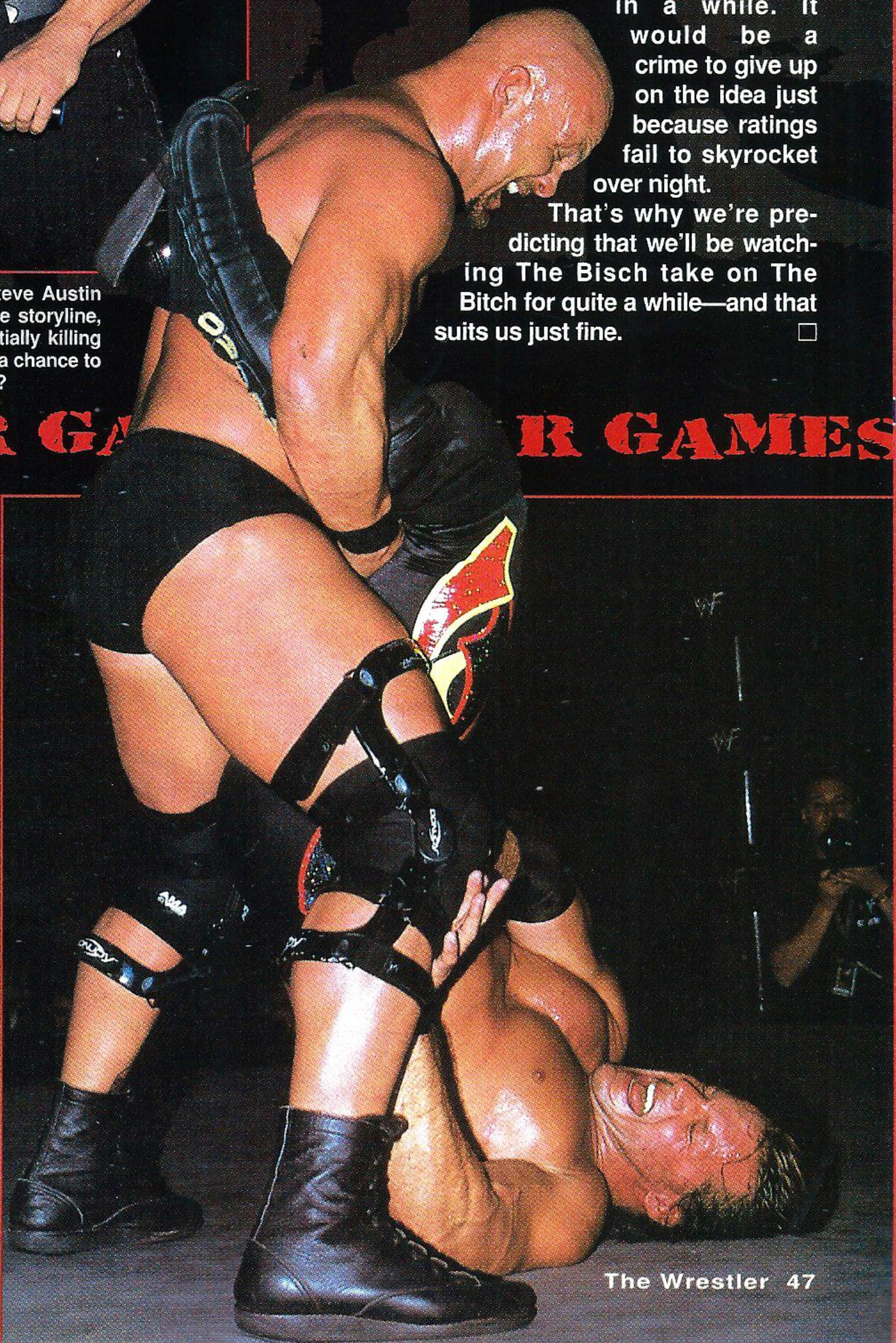
That's why we're predicting that we'll be watching The Bisch take on The Bitch for quite a while—and that suits us just fine. □

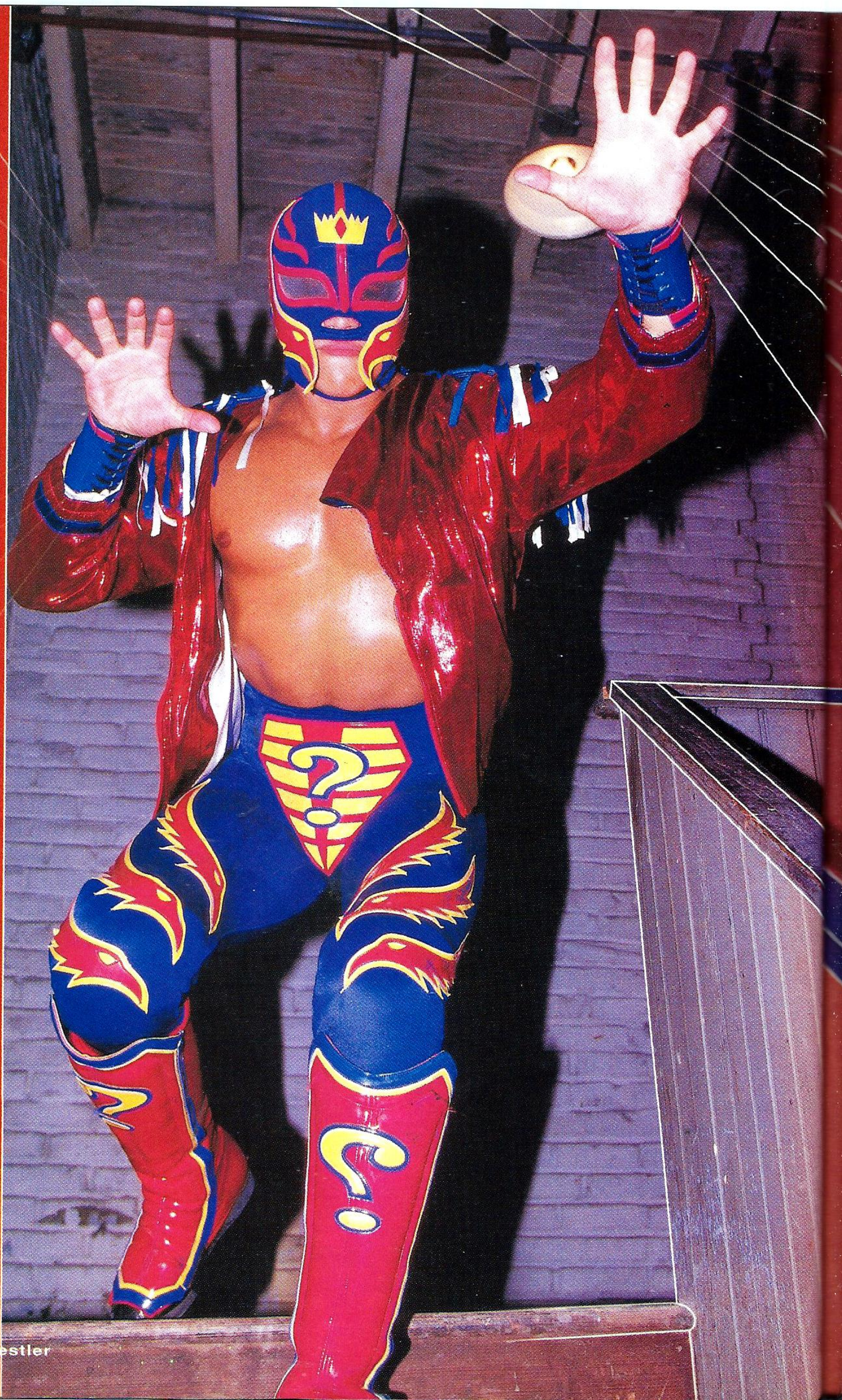
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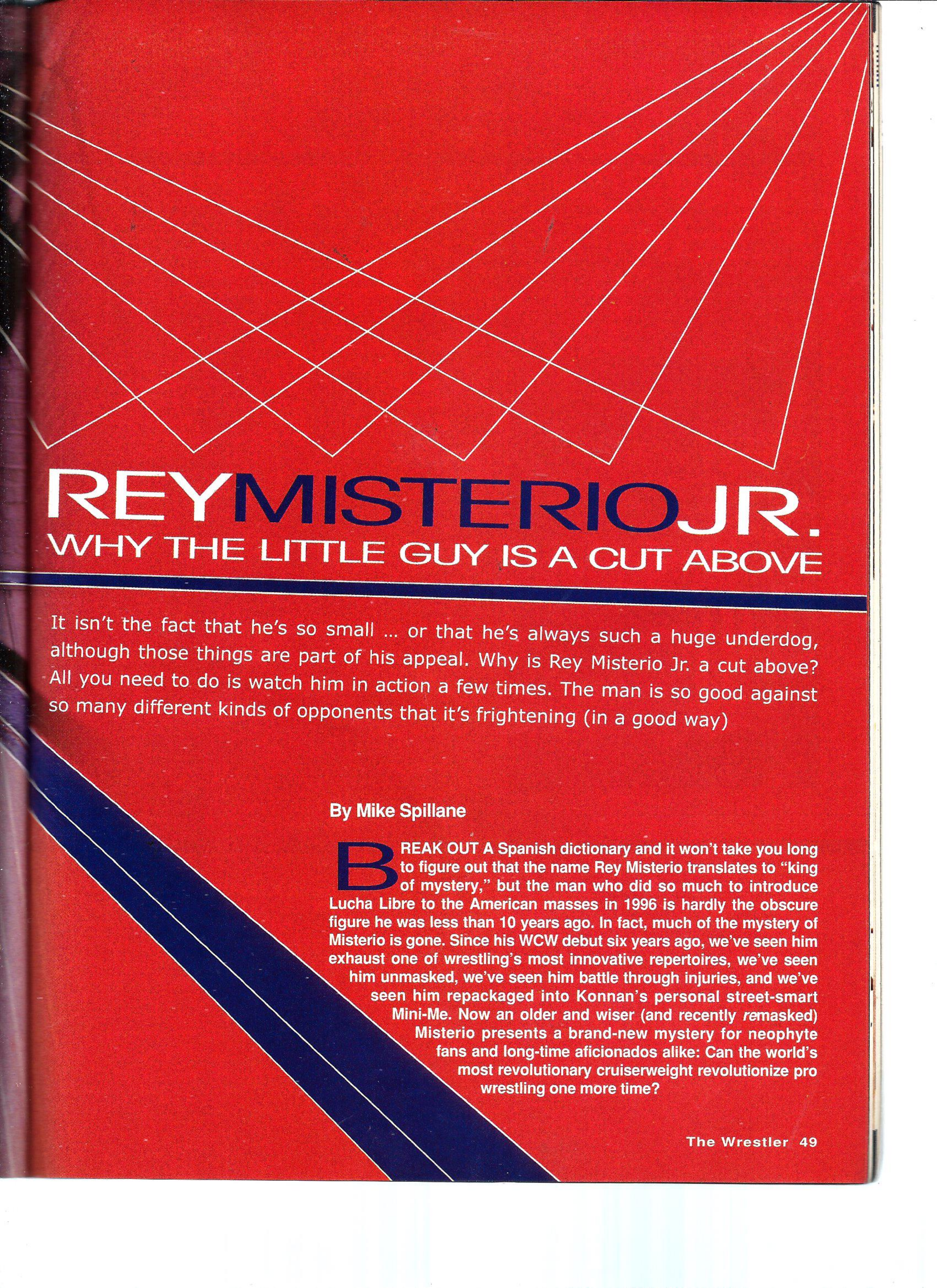
McMahon heading up *Smackdown*. After "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin walked out, McMahon scrapped the separate owners storyline and killed the NWO storyline (which was derailed yet again—just as it was being primed to be *Raw*'s lead storyline—when Kevin Nash tore his quadriceps), instead changing over to the brand extension general manager storyline.

The good news is that McMahon is committed to making the brand extension work. Proof of that came when he took the extension storyline in a different direction with general managers when everyone else was clamoring for it to end. And considering that McMahon has suffered so many setbacks recently, it's testament to his fortitude that he found another way to keep the storyline churning.

Another reason to believe that







REYMISTERIOJR.

WHY THE LITTLE GUY IS A CUT ABOVE

It isn't the fact that he's so small ... or that he's always such a huge underdog, although those things are part of his appeal. Why is Rey Misterio Jr. a cut above? All you need to do is watch him in action a few times. The man is so good against so many different kinds of opponents that it's frightening (in a good way)

By Mike Spillane

BREAK OUT A Spanish dictionary and it won't take you long to figure out that the name Rey Misterio translates to "king of mystery," but the man who did so much to introduce Lucha Libre to the American masses in 1996 is hardly the obscure figure he was less than 10 years ago. In fact, much of the mystery of Misterio is gone. Since his WCW debut six years ago, we've seen him exhaust one of wrestling's most innovative repertoires, we've seen him unmasked, we've seen him battle through injuries, and we've seen him repackaged into Konnan's personal street-smart Mini-Me. Now an older and wiser (and recently *remasked*) Misterio presents a brand-new mystery for neophyte fans and long-time aficionados alike: Can the world's most revolutionary cruiserweight revolutionize pro wrestling one more time?

THE TALE OF REY MISTERIO JR.

The story of the world's most renowned high-flyer begins with *el colibri*, the Spanish word for "hummingbird." In 1992, the man we know today as Rey Misterio Jr. was barely five feet tall. In Lucha Libre, any wrestler smaller than 5'1" is classified as a mini superstar, and Misterio was assigned to the minis division when he was ready to debut.

He donned a colorful mask and took the name Colibri when he was just 15 years old. Colibri was learning his craft from Rey Misterio Sr., his real-life uncle. Eventually, though, Colibri (literally) outgrew the minis division and needed a new identity to restart his career.

Seeing the potential to continue his legacy, Rey Misterio Sr. bestowed his name on

his nephew, leading many to falsely (yet understandably) reason they were father and son. Rey Misterio Jr. would soon outshine his mentor and uncle (who remains a fixture in Mexico), as the fans of AAA fell in love with the exciting youngster with myriad variations of the huracanrana. When AAA landed a pay-per-view deal (thanks in large part to a relationship with WCW) in 1994, Misterio had already become the company's most beloved star, even more so than regulars like Latin Lover, La Parka, and Octagon.

In November 1994, American wrestling fans got their first taste of Rey Misterio Jr. on *When Worlds Collide*, the first Lucha Libre PPV offered in the United States. Misterio didn't steal the show that night, but the exposure eventually helped get him booked on an important card—Antonio Inoki's interpromotional World Wrestling

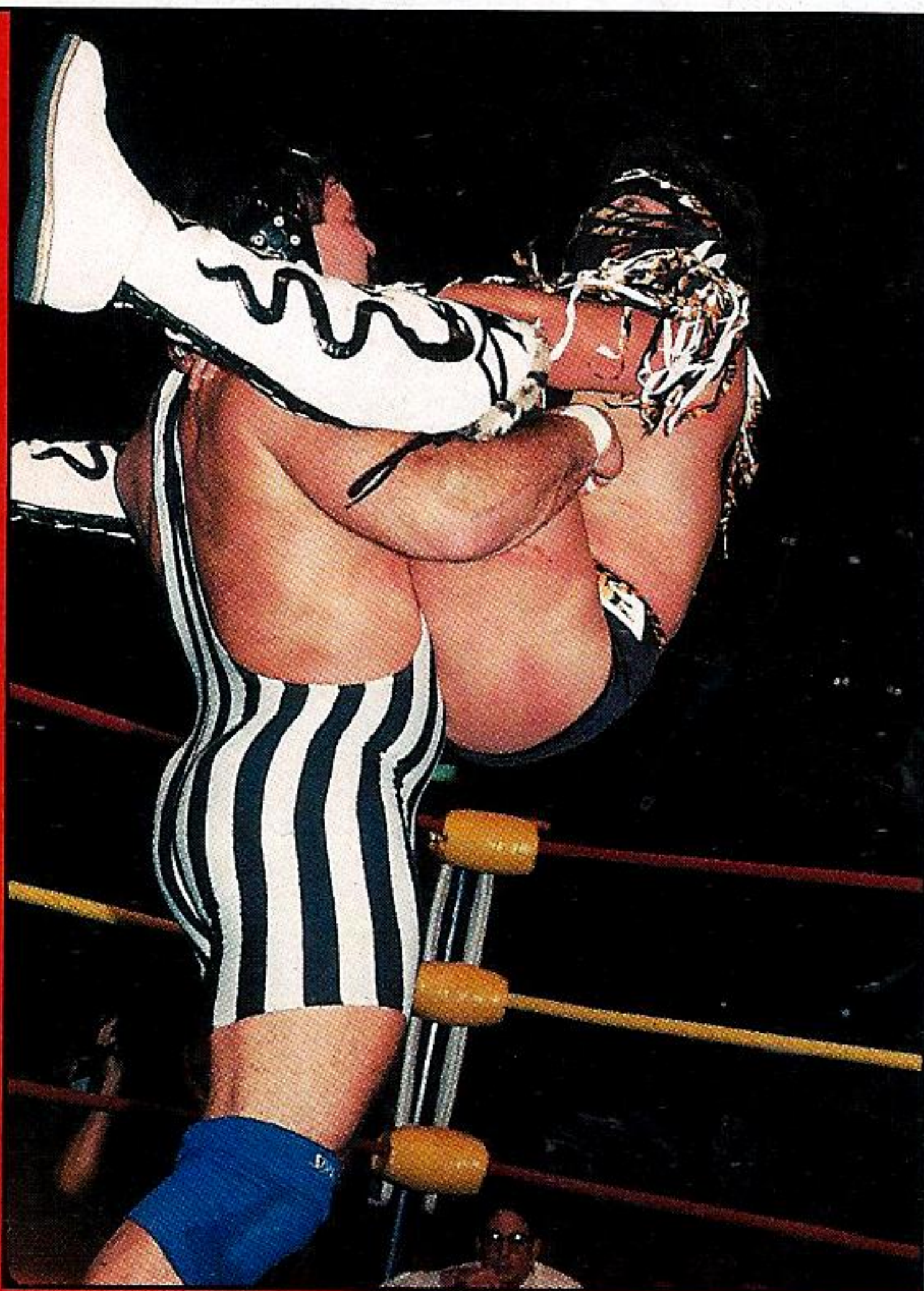
Peace Festival card, held in Los Angeles in June 1996. Misterio was already a fixture in AAA at the time, and had even appeared domestically with ECW (where he was also a smashing success) on a number of occasions, but it was the Peace Festival that brought him to the attention of Eric Bischoff.

Bischoff was recruiting an army of cruiserweights for WCW, and just two weeks after the Peace Festival, Misterio debuted at WCW's Great American Bash opposite Dean Malenko. Misterio would go on to hold the WCW cruiserweight title five times, and, in the process, bring Lucha Libre to an American audience in a way it had never before been presented.

Misterio led a Lucha invasion of sorts, and many of his Mexican rivals, like Psicosis, Juventud Guerrera, and Super Calo, followed him from ECW to WCW. His innovative, fast-paced style caught on quickly with the appreciative WCW fans, and Misterio became a *Nitro* regular until the company's sale to Vince McMahon.

Knee problems sidelined Misterio here and there, but thanks to surgery and heavy knee braces, he is still able to wrestle at a very high level. After polishing his skills in Mexico and Puerto Rico, Misterio struck a deal with WWE, made a brief stop in the HWA, then one of WWE's developmental territories, and was eventually added to the *Smackdown* roster, where he currently appears in a prominent role each week.

—Mike Spillane



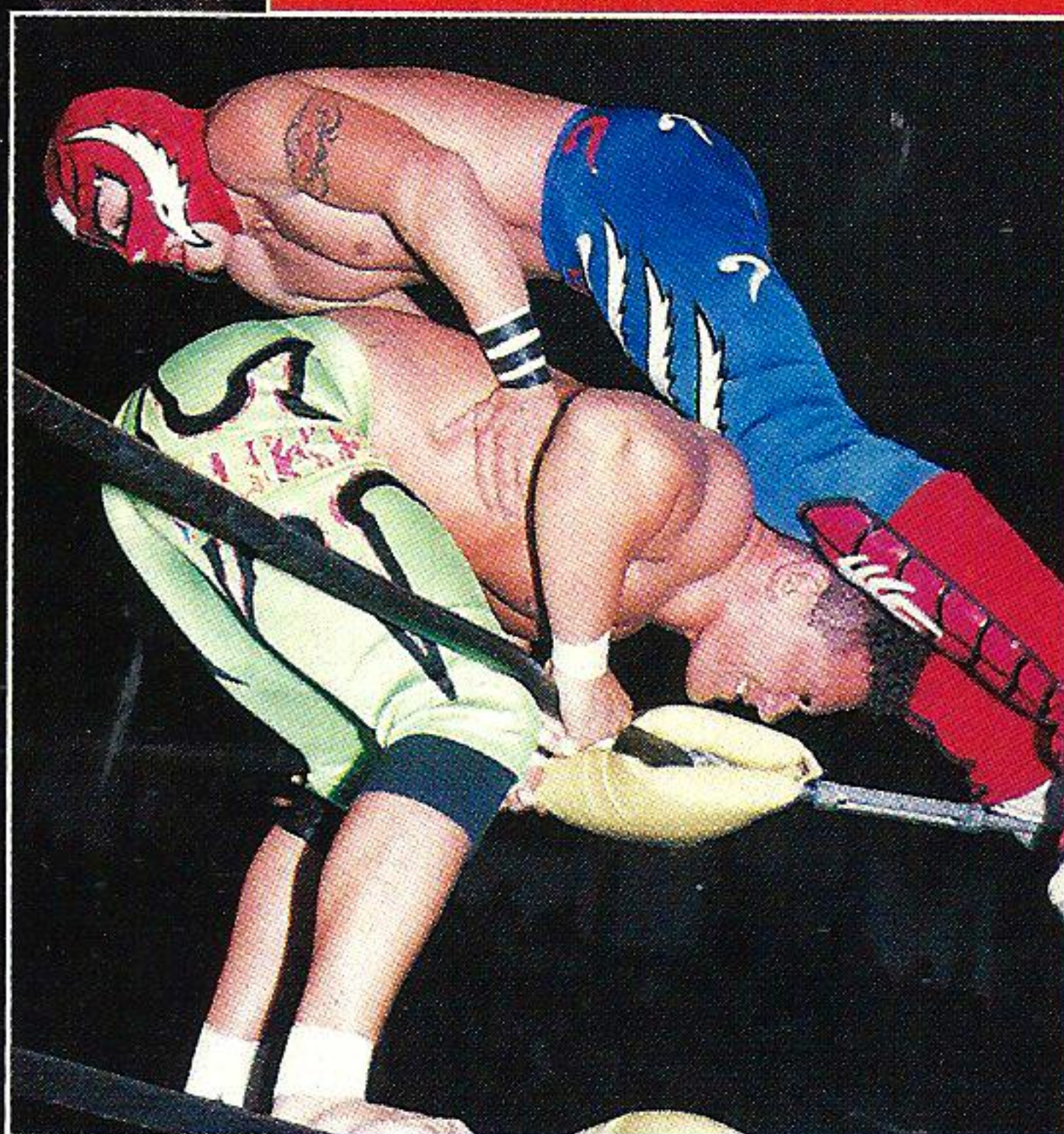
Rey Misterio Sr. vs. Rick Steiner in 1990

The Monday night wars may seem like a dream from a lifetime ago, but it was just a few years ago that the WWF and WCW were fighting for tenths of ratings points in quarter hours every week. For 82 consecutive weeks between the summer of 1996 and the spring of

1998, WCW's *Nitro* was the ratings winner, and the breakout star of that era was Rey Misterio Jr. The masked native of San Diego wasn't a main-eventer, but he stole shows night after night on television and in arenas around the country. Almost singlehandedly,

Constantly competing against the best grapplers from each style of wrestling, Misterio became a true force in the ring and rarely had even an average match. The ability to adapt to different kinds of opponents was perhaps his greatest and most easily overlooked gift.

Misterio ignited a worldwide interest in Mexican Lucha Libre, the acrobatic and fast-paced cousin of American pro wrestling. His daredevil style made him a favorite, and his rivalries with men like Ultimo Dragon,



Some people groaned when Misterio was signed to a series of matches against a very green and unproven rookie named Prince Laukea in 1997. There was supposedly no way Misterio was going to get good matches out of the youngster. But he did, because he has an uncanny ability to adapt his style to mesh with that of his opponent. The results are usually good.

Before Rey Mysterio Jr. and a host of other Luchadors (including Juventud Guerrera) arrived in WCW six years ago, most American fans knew nothing about Lucha Libre, but when they saw Misterio, they were glad they were introduced to it. Now some younger fans are just getting to know Rey for the first time.

fellow risk-taking Luchadors such as Halloween, Psicosis, and Juventud Guerrera.

Constantly competing against the best grapplers from each style of wrestling, Misterio became a true force in the ring and rarely had even an average match. The ability to adapt to different kinds of opponents was perhaps his greatest and most easily overlooked gift.

His 5'3" frame, which most felt would make it impossible for him to even get a chance in the States, proved to be his

Eddie Guerrero, and Dean Malenko showed everyone he was a world-class wrestler capable of handling opponents with significant height and weight advantages (which meant every other wrestler in WCW).

He even recorded a pinfall win over 7', 350-pound Kevin Nash live on *Nitro*.

Misterio's groundbreaking hybrid style was helping him win cruiserweight and tag team championships several times over in WCW rings. He fought tough but agile Japanese stars like Jushin Liger and Yuji Nagata, rugged mat-based European wrestlers like Steven (now William) Regal and Dave "Fit" Finlay, and

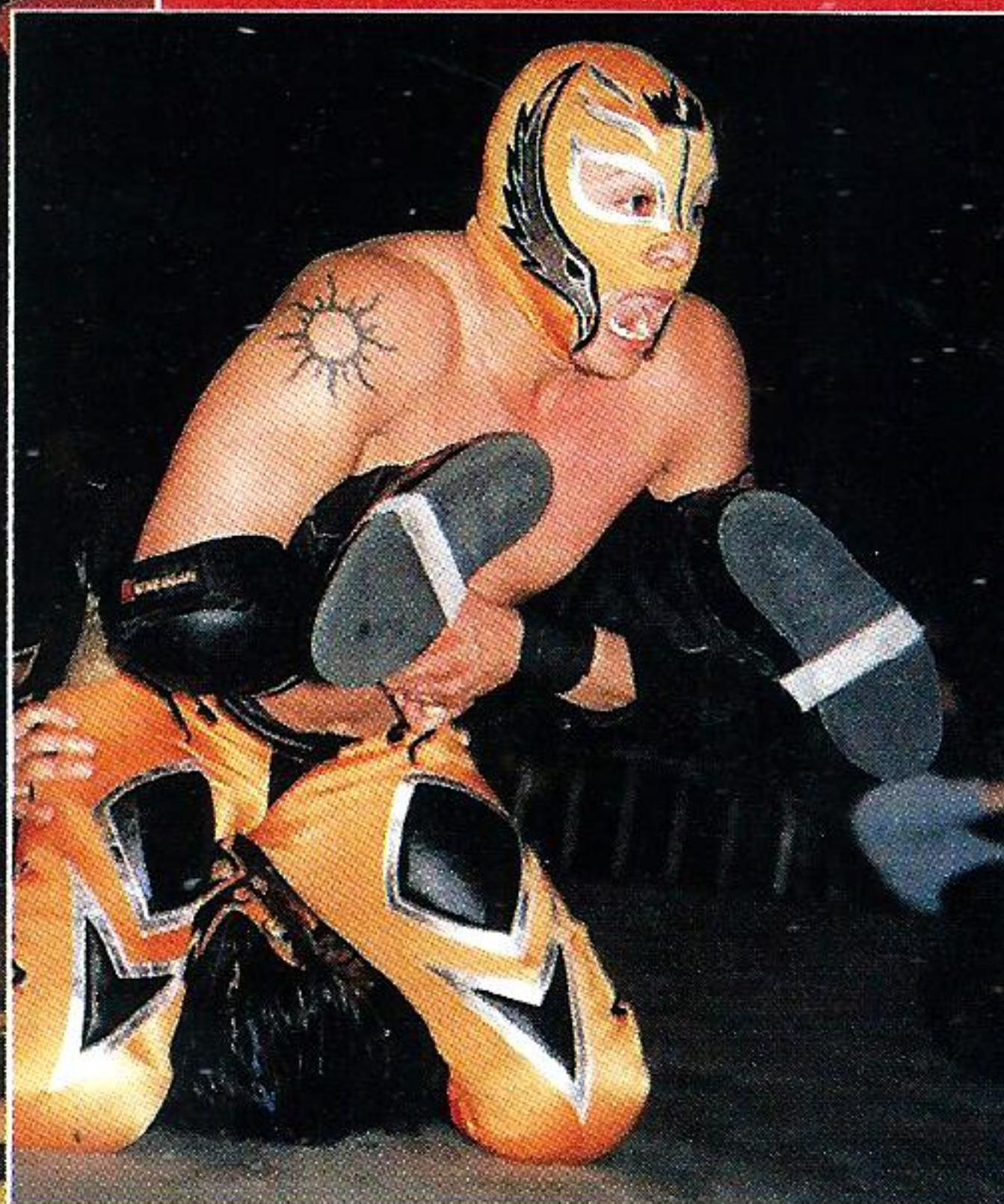
greatest advantage. Perfect control over his compact frame allowed little Rey to use his body in ways no other wrestler ever had, and the result was golden. By March 2001, he had held a total of nine championships in WCW.

The "King Of Mystery's" success, however, did come at a high price. His high-risk style began to wear down his body, and for a while, he was plagued by knee injuries that kept him out of action for weeks or even months on end. Remarkably, Misterio lost none of his blinding speed



Misterio is surprisingly strong, even though his forte is clearly soaring high above the mat. Since WCW's demise, Misterio has continued to build muscle, and weighs closer to 165 pounds now, with a chiseled body that seems like a perfect fit for today's WWE.

Signing Misterio, of course, was not WWE's first foray into the Lucha world. Trying to mimic the success of WCW's cruiserweight division, the WWF assembled *SuperAstros* in 1997, a Lucha Libre program with a distinctly American flavor. For a short time, the daredevil athletes from AAA even appeared on *Raw*, in the hope that Lucha fanatics would give WWF programming a chance. When these experiments did nothing for ratings, the WWF abandoned them. Even with Mr. Aguila remaining on the roster—under the name Essa Rios—there was little in the way of a Lucha presence in the WWF through the late-1990s. The vast majority of the WWE roster thus has no experience wrestling opposite a Luchador.



Ask Eddie Guerrero how good Misterio is. He not only has an array of dazzling moves, but he can turn a match around unbelievably quickly. Just when you think he's going to succumb to a crushing power bomb (above left), he turns it into a pinning combination with amazing speed and precision (above right).

and came back to win a number of championships in WCW before the company was put up for sale, and ultimately acquired by World Wrestling Federation Inc. in 2001.

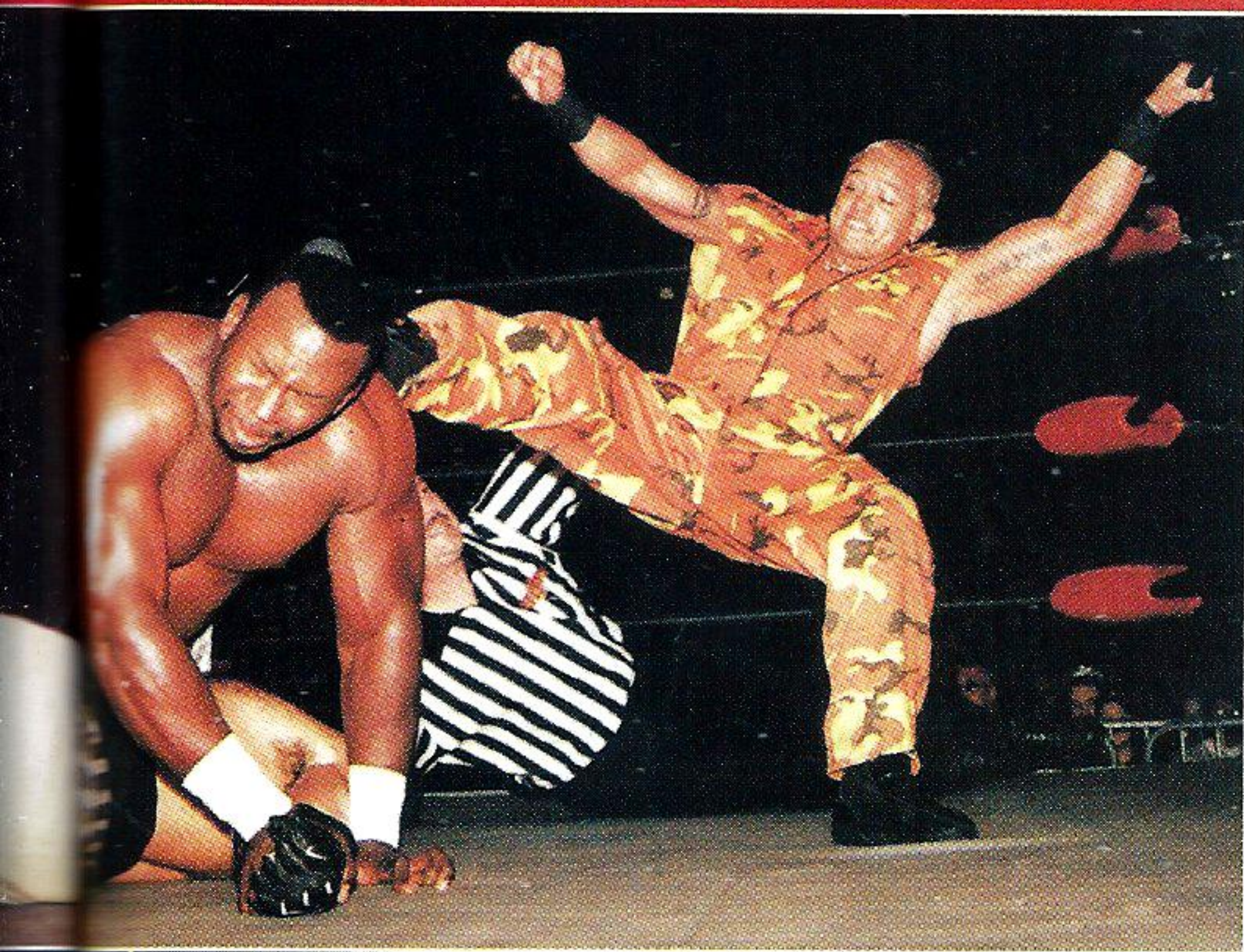
The difference between Misterio and many of his cruiserweight contemporaries was and still is his physique—Rey was 140 pounds of muscle during his long run in WCW, and his short stature often fooled opponents into thinking of him as a weakling. In fact,

Misterio chose the perfect time to resurface. The existing WWE roster features only a handful of men whom he wrestled before—Eddie and Chavo Guerrero, Chris Jericho, and Billy Kidman being the most prominent. His style will be utterly alien to men like Triple-H and Kurt Angle (a man he pinned cleanly on *Smackdown* in August). Although he won't celebrate his 28th birthday until December, Misterio has literally been wrestling for half his life. He started training at age 14, and his experience in the U.S., Mexico, and Japan makes him a veteran of many styles. In that all-important experience department, he has relative new-

comers like John Cena and Brock Lesnar beaten by a mile. When it comes to speed, there aren't many men who can match Misterio in the ring, and lumbering heavyweights like Kane and Albert can expect to exhaust themselves trying to catch up to Misterio between the ropes.

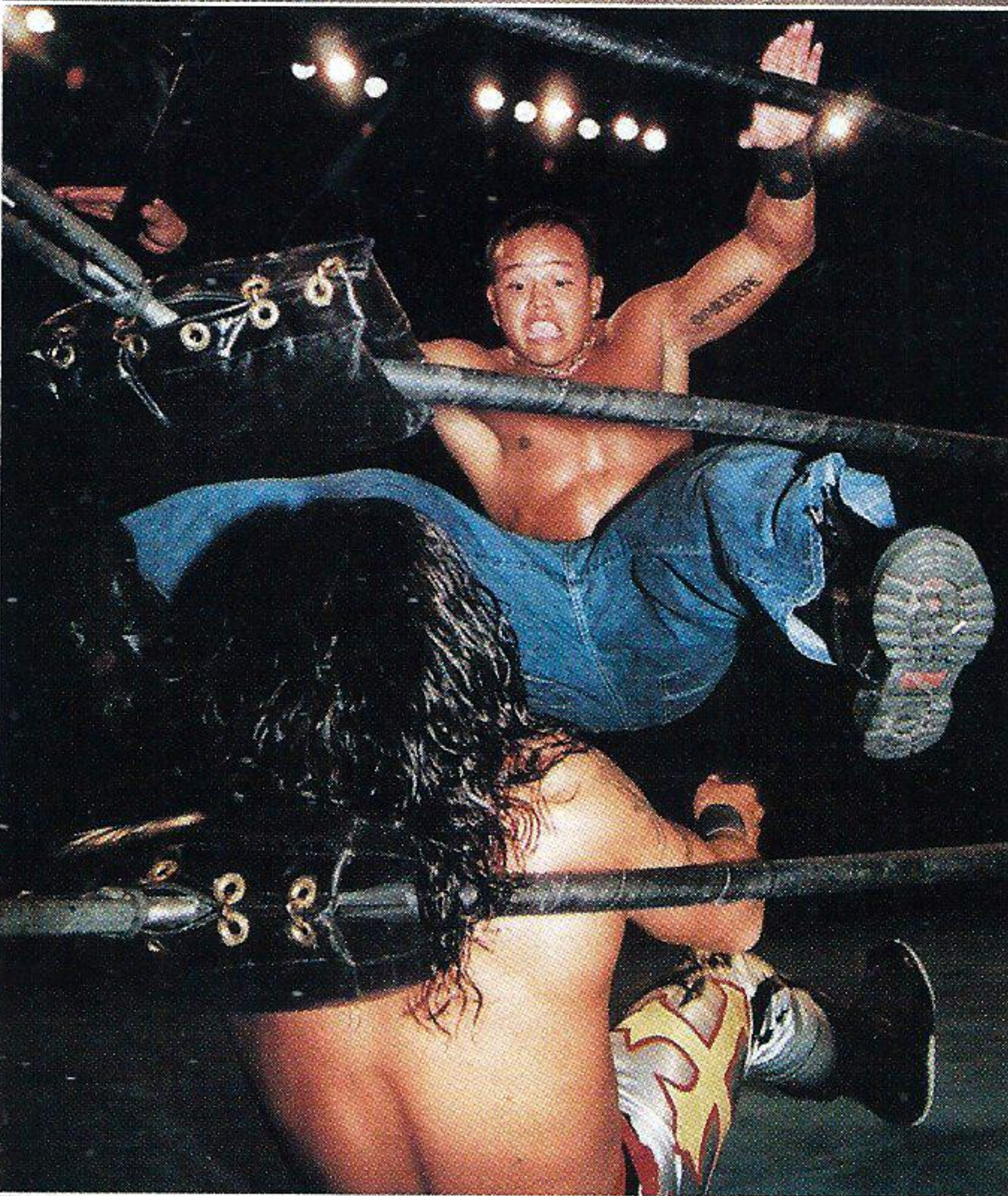
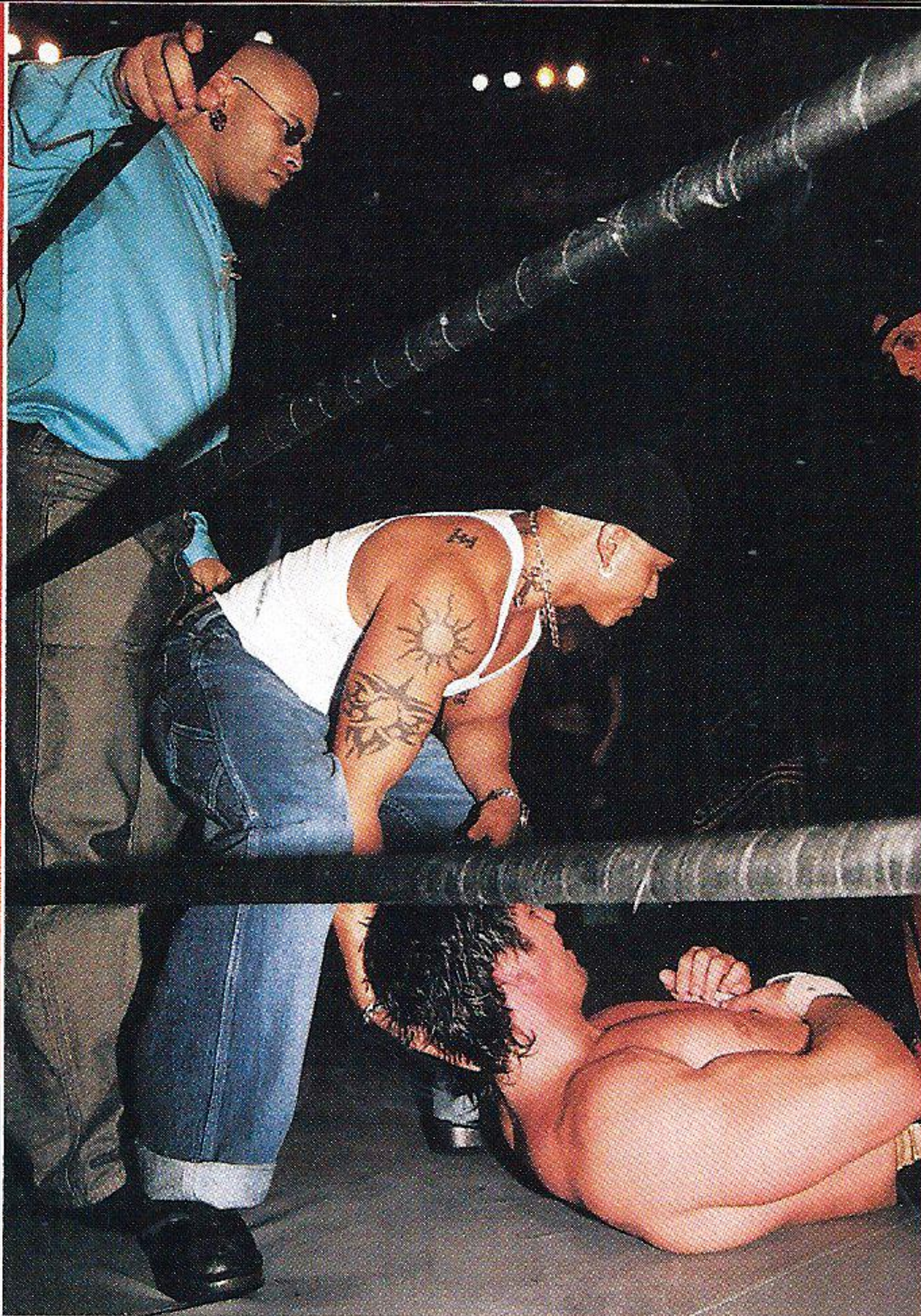
In reality, WWE has never had an aerialist the caliber of Misterio, and wrestlers who have trouble countering that style, like Test and Triple-H, could be confounded by his death-defying moves in much the same way Angle was on the first night they locked up.

Undoubtedly, Misterio will have some tough matches ahead of him in WWE. The men likely to have the hardest time with him, though, are those who take to the air themselves. Wrestlers like Jeff Hardy and Rob Van Dam are high-flying risk-takers for sure, but will they risk dwelling in a domain ruled by the "King Of Mystery." So much of what is considered high-flying today is derived from Misterio that it will only serve to give Rey an edge on everyone crowding the airspace above the top turnbuckles.



A lumbering brawler like Stevie Ray against little Rey-Rey? Looks like an ugly match on paper, but he has a knack for bringing out the best in everyone he faces off against.

Rey Misterio Jr. might never hold the undisputed WWE title in his career. In fact, it's highly unlikely that he will. If we've learned anything from the Monday night wars of the late-'90s, though, it is that title changes aren't the only things that intrigue fans. One star can change the wrestling business more than any title change—a star like Steve Austin, like Goldberg, and like Rey Misterio Jr. In the land of giants that is the WWE locker room, the smallest superstar of all is perhaps the most remarkable. The most spectacular, breathtaking, show-stealing mystery awaits us, and no "King Of Mystery" himself. □



Misterio's appeal began to wane in WCW not after he was unmasked, but rather after he was repackaged into a street-smart gang member under Konnan in The Filthy Animals (top). The bronco buster was a crowd pleaser (above), but in using it often, he gradually got away from doing the kind of things that made him such a popular Luchador in the first place.

A.J. STYLES:

The Man Who Said "No" To WWE... And Doesn't Regret It!

A.J. Styles had a chance to sign on the dotted line with the largest wrestling company in the world, and after giving it some thought, he turned it down. As it turns out, it was the best career decision he has ever made

By Dan Murphy

EVERY AMERICAN WRESTLER who pulls on the tights and laces up the boots dreams of getting signed by WWE. Sure, a few aspire to make it big in Japan, and some know they will never be anything more than weekend warriors, but almost every single one will at least allow himself to dream from time to time.

It's that dream that makes everything bearable—

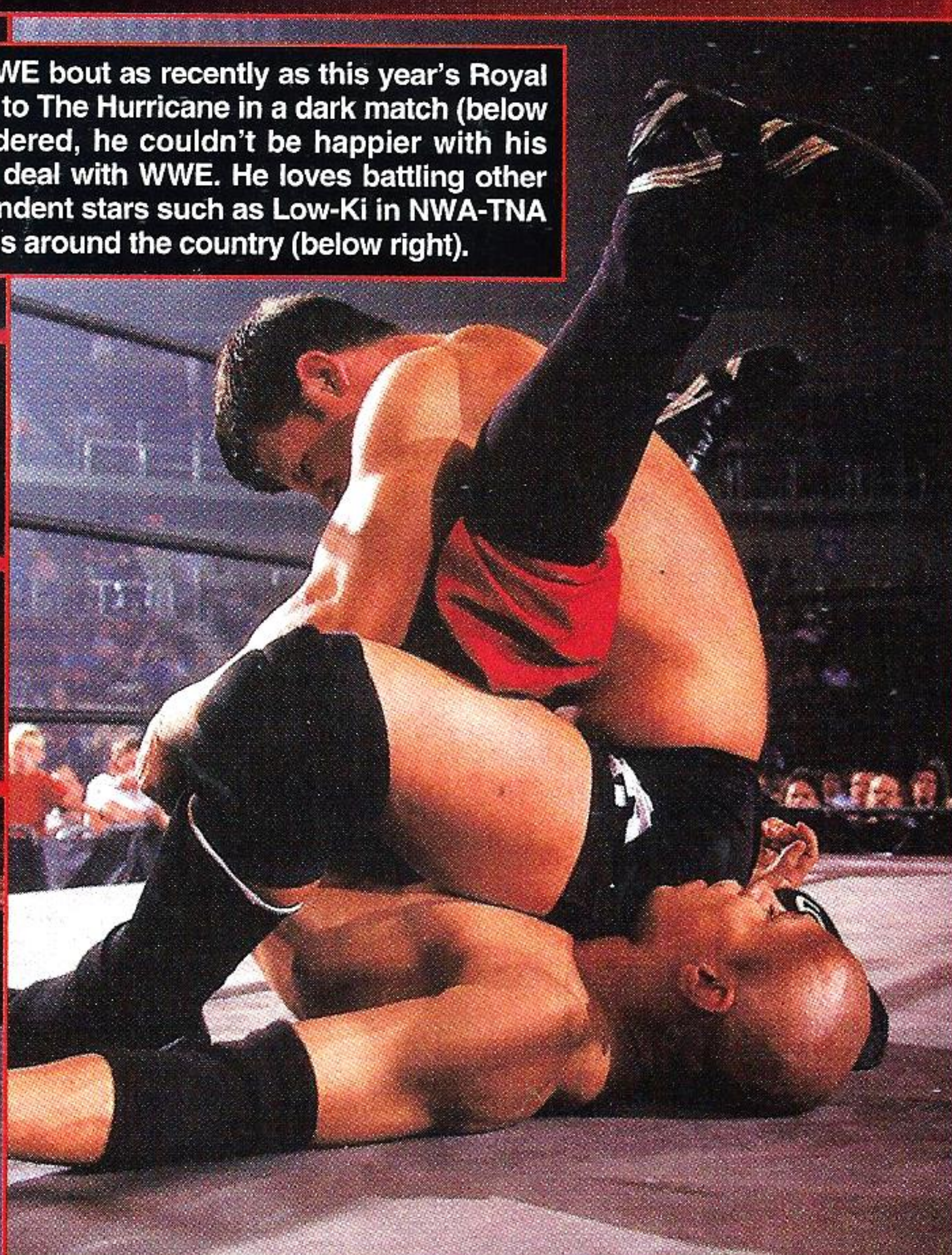
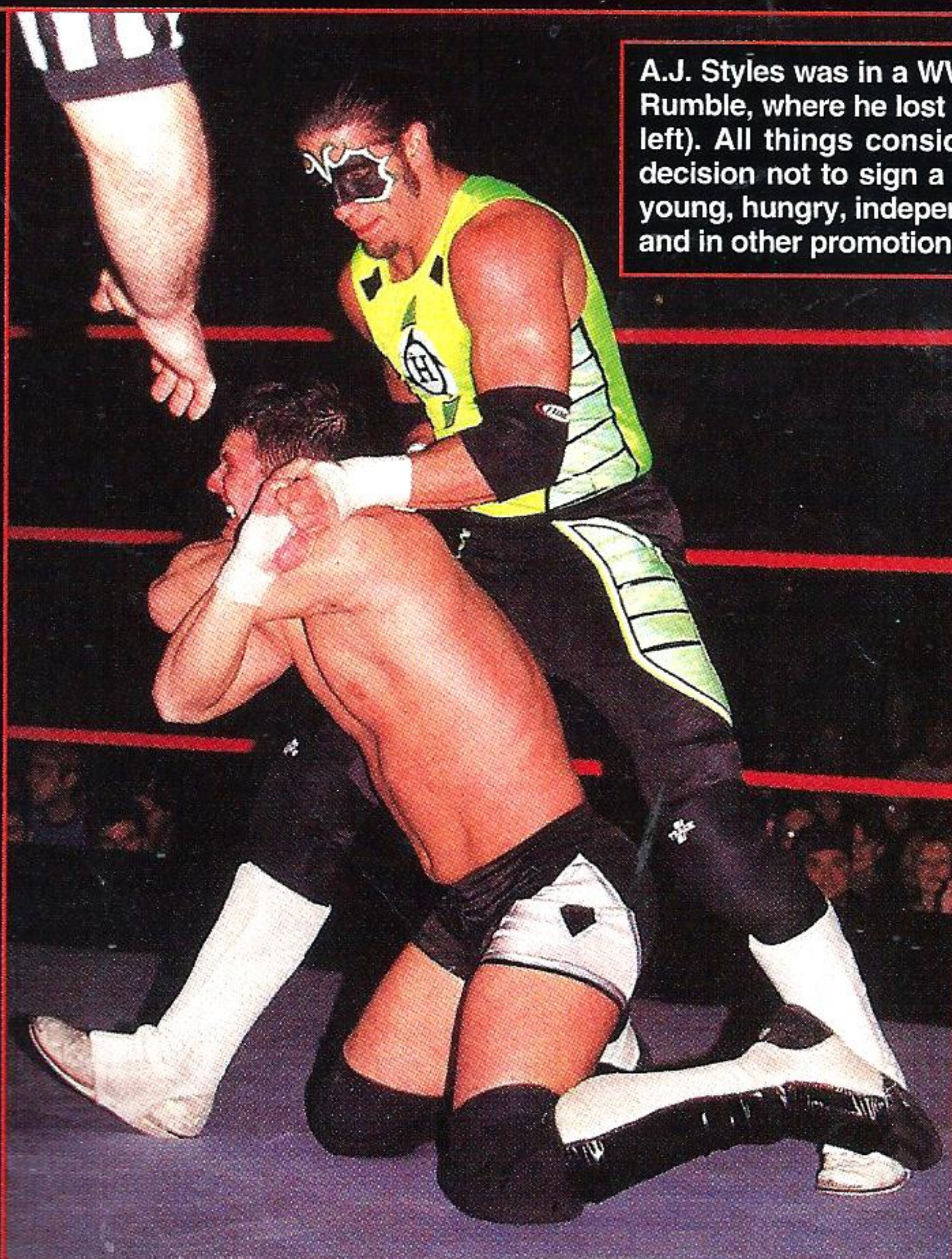
the 11-hour drives to old VFW posts for shows, the nagging injuries, the meager paychecks, all the time away from friends and family. Pro wrestling can be a lousy way to earn a living.

But there's always that hope, the chance that *it* will come.

The Call.

The phone rings and the WWE talent scout on the other end tells you WWE management thinks you might just have what it takes to become a

A.J. Styles was in a WWE bout as recently as this year's Royal Rumble, where he lost to The Hurricane in a dark match (below left). All things considered, he couldn't be happier with his decision not to sign a deal with WWE. He loves battling other young, hungry, independent stars such as Low-Ki in NWA-TNA and in other promotions around the country (below right).





WWE superstar. Big money, international stardom, and the realization of a lifelong dream just might be waiting for you on the other end of that phone line. Most indy wrestlers would shove their grandmothers down a flight of stairs to be considered for a WWE developmental deal.

Not A.J. Styles, the young man who said "Thanks but no thanks" to Johnny Ace, Jim Ross' right-hand man in WWE's talent relations department.

And he has no regrets.

"People might think I've got a big set of [grapefruits] or something, but that's not it at all," Styles said recently by phone from his Gainesville, Georgia, home.

"I went to a WWE tryout camp in Cincinnati a few months ago, and a couple days later, Johnny Ace called and said they'd offer me something. They wanted to give me the usual developmental deal. I would get paid around \$500 a week, and I'd have to move to Cincinnati."

Styles, 25, told Ace he would think it over. After hanging up the phone, he sat down to discuss things with his wife. Married for two years, Styles has a comfortable lifestyle in Gainesville. When he's not wrestling for an independent promotion, he works part-time as a landscaper. His boss also happens to be the deacon of his church.

When Ace called, Styles and his wife were nearing their two-year anniversary. In order to accept the deal, Styles would have had to ask his wife to drop out of college ... or the two would have had to live 440 miles apart.

And Styles and his wife already had a taste of national exposure when he briefly worked with WCW during that promotion's dying

All the success Styles has enjoyed in just a few months with NWA-TNA helped to get him noticed by Philadelphia-based Ring of Honor, where he defended the X title once before losing it to Low-Ki in August. He beat David Young (above right) and Adam Jacobs (right) in an exciting three-way in July.

"Man, I really wanted to take it, but I just couldn't. It just wasn't worth it. I couldn't support myself and my wife on that salary ... God first, family second. That's the way I was raised. Besides, if they like me now, I can't do anything but get better."



days. The downfall of WCW forced him to become a little more critical. A developmental deal was great, but that alone doesn't guarantee you a run in the big-time. He could toil for years in the Heartland Wrestling Association (until recently, WWE's Cincinnati-based training ground) and Ohio Valley Wrestling before he made it to the main roster or even saw his first televised WWE match. It was a long time to be away from home, and the financial outlook wasn't promising.

"The money just wasn't that great, but it was an opportunity to work for WWE," Styles said. As he and his wife weighed the pros and cons, the decision became easier to make. "Man, I really wanted to take it, but I just couldn't. It just wasn't worth it. I couldn't support myself and my wife on that salary."

So Styles contacted Ace, a man whom he got to know well during his WCW run, and said he had to turn down the offer. He appreciated

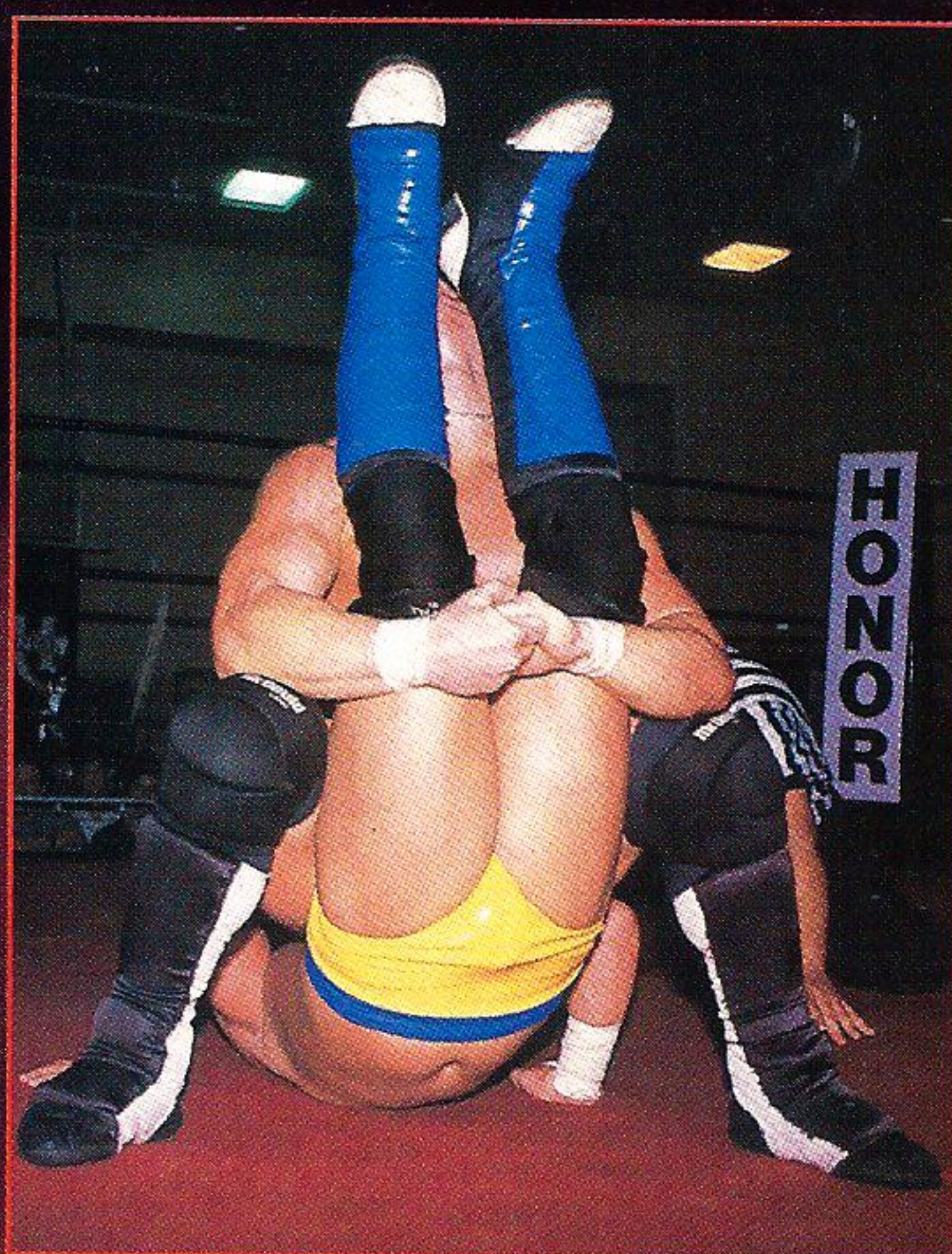
This leglock Styles is using on Jacobs in Ring of Honor is one you might not have seen before. A.J. is quite the innovator, and he's still only 25. His long-term future looks very bright, and don't be surprised if WWE gives him another call; next time it might not be a developmental deal that's offered.

it, of course. It just wasn't the right choice at that particular time, Styles explained.

"God first, family second. That's the way I was raised," he said. "Besides, if they like me now, I can't do anything but get better."

It was a risky decision, but it looks like it's proving to be the right one. Just a few months after Ace made that phone call to Styles, WWE ended its relationship with the HWA and released many of the developmental prospects who had been training there. In the meantime, Styles had signed with Jerry Jarrett's upstart NWA-TNA promotion and quickly won that promotion's tag team title (with Jerry Lynn) as well as the exciting X division title.

Featuring top talent such as Styles, Lynn, Low-Ki (who recently won the belt in a three-way match), and Kid Kash, the X division has quickly built a reputation as the most innovative in wrestling. Similar to a cruiserweight title, the division features mostly high-flyers, but there is no weight limit set. Therefore, a wrestler doesn't have to worry about being labeled an X division wrestler and getting excluded from main events and shots at the heavyweight championship. Plus, despite sharing the tag title with Lynn until it was held up on August 14, Styles and Lynn currently are feuding, and their one-on-one



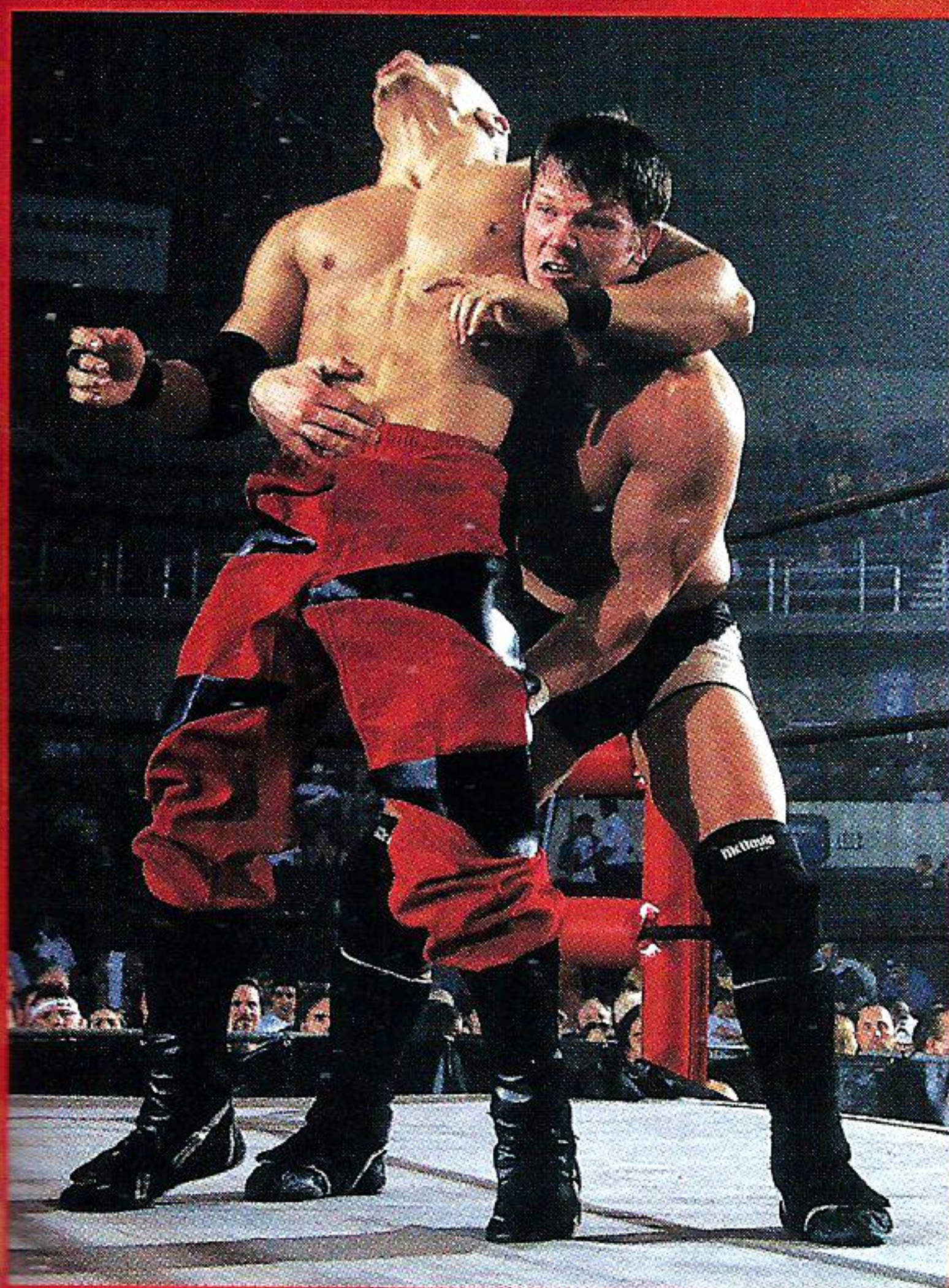
series promises to rival Lynn's legendary ECW feud with Rob Van Dam in terms of innovation and excitement.

So far, Styles and new NWA heavyweight champion Ron "The Truth" Killings (formerly K-Kwik/K-Krush) have been the two biggest surprises in NWA-TNA, and Styles in particular is earning a reputation as one of the most thrilling in-ring performers on the indy circuit. His star is still very much on the rise.

"How could I regret turning down the developmental deal? Coming to NWA-TNA was the best thing I've ever done in my life," he said.

"I think the X division is phenomenal. It doesn't limit you in any way. Just because you've got that belt doesn't mean you can't go for the heavyweight belt. It's a really innovative concept, and to think I was the first champion. That might be written in a book someday. It's really pretty incredible."

And just think, it never would have happened had Styles said "yes" to WWE. Styles may have temporarily closed the door on the world's biggest wrestling company, but he has opened the door to a whole new and promising career. And odds are, he will get another call from Johnny Ace someday. □



You can't beat the schedule offered by NWA-TNA. Styles might not make millions with Jerry Jarrett's company, but he can be going home for move with Low-Ki in Nashville on Wednesday night, then be back home in Georgia with his wife and working his landscaping job by Thursday—and that's each and every week!

Photos By Timothy A. Walker



The blood just kept pouring down Rikishi's face after the brutal postmatch attack by Gangrel. He vowed to get revenge (opposite page), he screamed in frustration and anger (near right), but he was eventually coaxed out of the ring by Afa Sr. (far right) so he could get medical attention. What happens between Rikishi and Gangrel from here is tough to predict.



The HORRIBLE Rikishi BLOODLETTING.

On this night, his backside was his best side

All those who just wanted to see Rikishi back that ass up on Gangrel at a special WXW show in Pennsylvania this summer got their wish and a little more. What they saw afterward was more revolting than any stinkface. It was a bloody beating that left Rikishi and his family shaken—and screaming for revenge!

By Frank Krewda

WHETHER YOU KNOW him as Vampire Warrior, David Heath, or even Luna Vachon's better half, the only thing you know for sure about Gangrel is that he has a morbid fascination with blood.

It can be animal blood. It can be human blood. It can even be fake blood. At World Xtreme Wrestling's "Sportsfest 2002" show this summer, it



Rikishi fans in and around Allentown, Pennsylvania, got to see their hero set up Gangrel (above left) and then deliver his trademark stinkface near the conclusion of the bout (above right). Unfortunately, they didn't get to see any postmatch dancing from the Samoan.

had to be Rikishi's blood. That much is certain.

But the question many of the 2,500 fans in attendance are still asking themselves is why. What could have drawn Gangrel all the way to Allentown, not only to challenge Rikishi, a local hero and a huge WWE star, but to administer one of the bloodiest postmatch beatings ever witnessed in the blue-collar Pennsylvania town?

Even the slightest explanation would ease the minds of Samu, Afa Jr., L.A. Smooth, and The Tonga Kid—a few of Rikishi's Samoan relatives also appearing on the card—who don't suffer rambunctious outsiders peacefully. As hard as Rikishi's comrades wrack their brains, none can come up with a plausible reason. However, they all agree the intruder was moti-

"The amount of blood he left in the ring and on dozens of towels that night in Allentown was enough to change a man's perspective on violence, revenge, his career, and maybe even his life. Yes, the big man is a proud warrior, but once the heat of engagement subsides, will Rikishi still count payback as his top priority?"

vated by more than his sanguinary cravings.

"I've seen some ugly attacks in my day," said WXW promoter Afa Sr., a three-time WWF World tag team champion in the 1980s. "Hell, I've been involved in a few myself. But what happened that night was one of the ugliest. Gangrel was on some kind of mission ... something we should have seen coming. But we were all caught by surprise."

To say Rikishi was surprised by Gangrel's sadistic behavior in Allentown would be an understatement

the size of his posterior, though Rikishi's astonishment at his main-event opponent didn't cause even the slightest twitch in his game face. Rikishi defeated Gangrel in a virtual squash that lasted less than three minutes that was capped off with a banzai drop.

And that was when things turned ugly. Shortly after getting pinned, Gangrel grabbed a chair and busted Rikishi wide open. Moments later, Da Hit Squad, Sugaa, and WWE's Batista joined the fray, which prompted the arrival of Samu, Afa Jr., Tonga Kid, L.A. Smooth, and even The Island Boys (Rosie and Jamal in WWE). With the attackers scrambling to get out of the ring, Afa Sr. even got involved, letting Da Hit Squad and Sugaa know he can still get very physical when necessary. Somewhere in the midst of the chaos, Rikishi grabbed the house microphone and vowed that his extended Samoan family would make Gangrel and his friends pay for what he had done.

"Gangrel made the biggest mistake of his life, the biggest mistake of his life!"

Rikishi bellowed while paramedics worked furiously to suture his wounds. "Nobody comes into my house and messes with me or my family. Gangrel's gonna wish he never heard of Al-

lentown, Pennsylvania!"

Yet while most WXW pundits would like to see Rikishi make Gangrel pay for his actions, some are openly voicing their doubt that Rikishi will get his revenge so easily. For one, the images of his horrific bloodletting are still fresh in their minds. Whether Rikishi is ready to admit or even acknowledge the fact, those who witnessed the attack know he absorbed the most vicious assault of his career.

The amount of blood he left in the ring and on dozens of towels that night in Allentown was enough to change a man's perspective on violence, revenge, his career, and maybe even his life. Yes, the big man is a proud warrior, but once the heat of engagement subsides, will Rikishi still count payback as his top priority?

"I don't think the physical or emotional wounds are going to heal anytime soon," WXW TV commentator Mark Clemson told *THE WRESTLER*. "You have to remember, these guys are very clannish. Most of them are family, and the Samoan culture is big on loyalty. The odds that this whole thing will just go away aren't very good."

With all due respect to Samoan culture, some people still believe that unless proper retribution is administered immediately, professional obligations and personal ambitions might prevail over the Samoans' dedication to vindicating their famous relative.

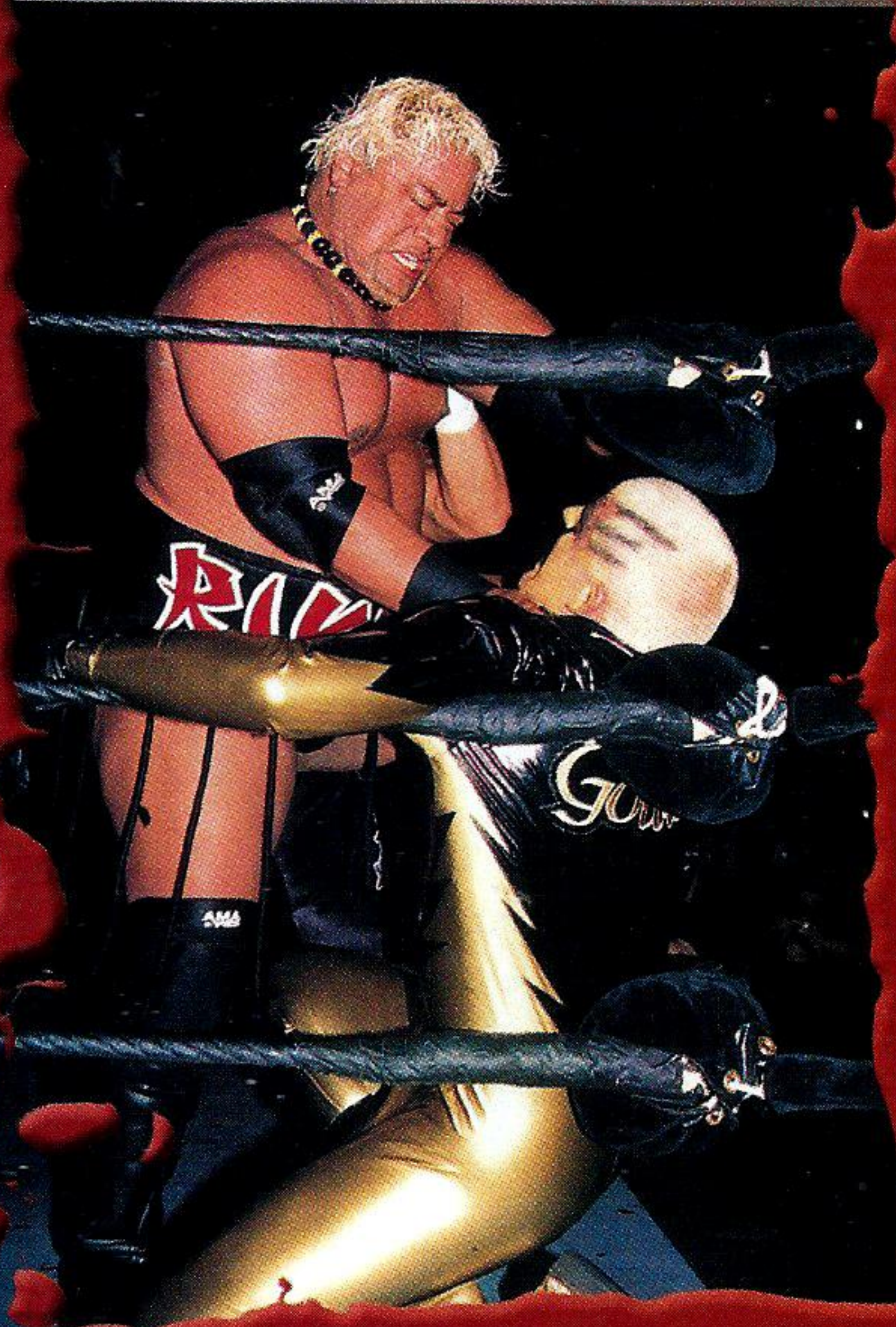
Those same factors might even prevent Rikishi himself from evening the score with his new rival. Let's face it: Rikishi is still a major player in WWE, a big-time superstar on *Smackdown*. Engaging in a violent feud with Gangrel on the independent level could jeopardize his WWE career. After spending so many years trying to win a roster spot, logic says Rikishi won't want to risk it all on a point of pride.

The same goes for the others. Can the individual members afford to put their careers on hold to fight an enemy they don't even understand? Fear of the unknown can give birth to some very deep questions, specifically, "Why am I doing this?"

For now, though, Rikishi isn't asking any questions. He's no longer worried about making sense of it all, not interested in any wherefores or whys. The man is committed to delivering the same punishment he suffered at Gangrel's hands.

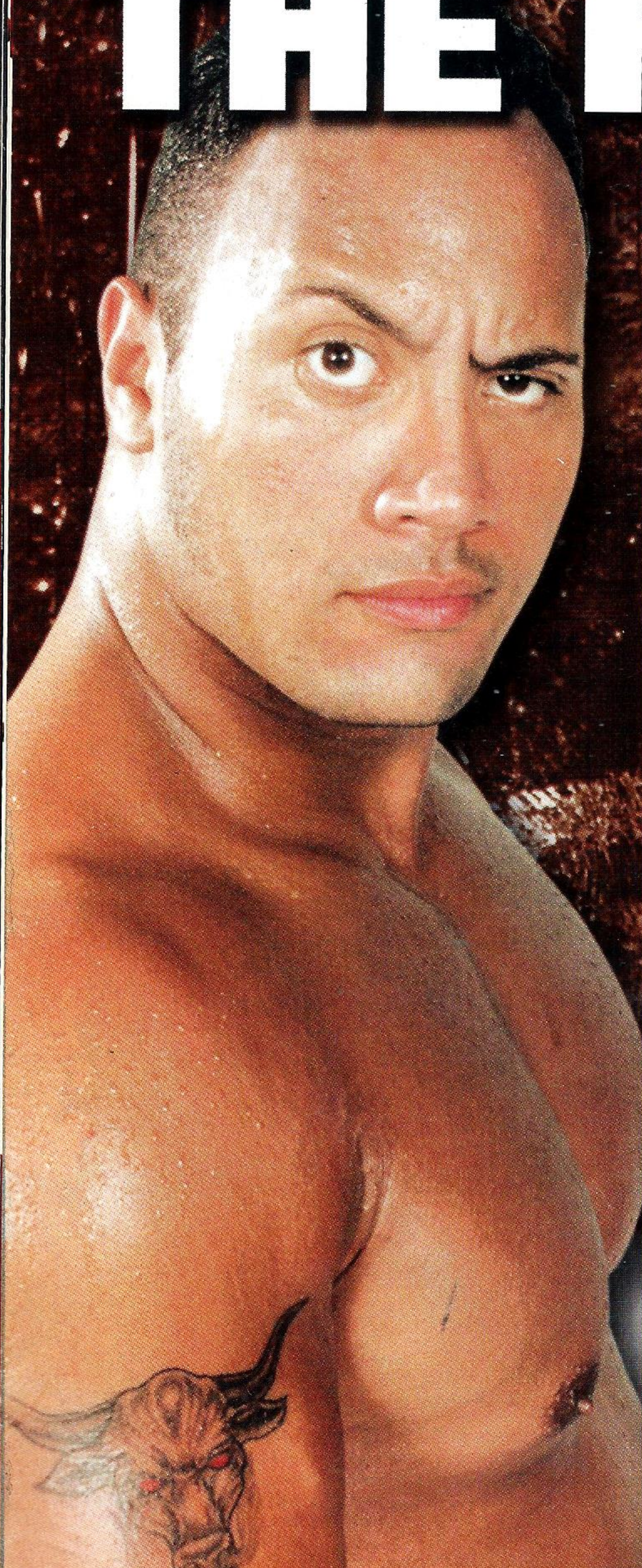
"There's no time for questions when a man walks into your house and tries to maim you in front of your family. You just do what you have to do to survive—and make sure it never happens again," he said.

Maybe in the course of completing that mission, Gangrel's purpose will emerge, or maybe Rikishi and those closest to him will simply beat it out of him. Maybe we'll never know for sure. □

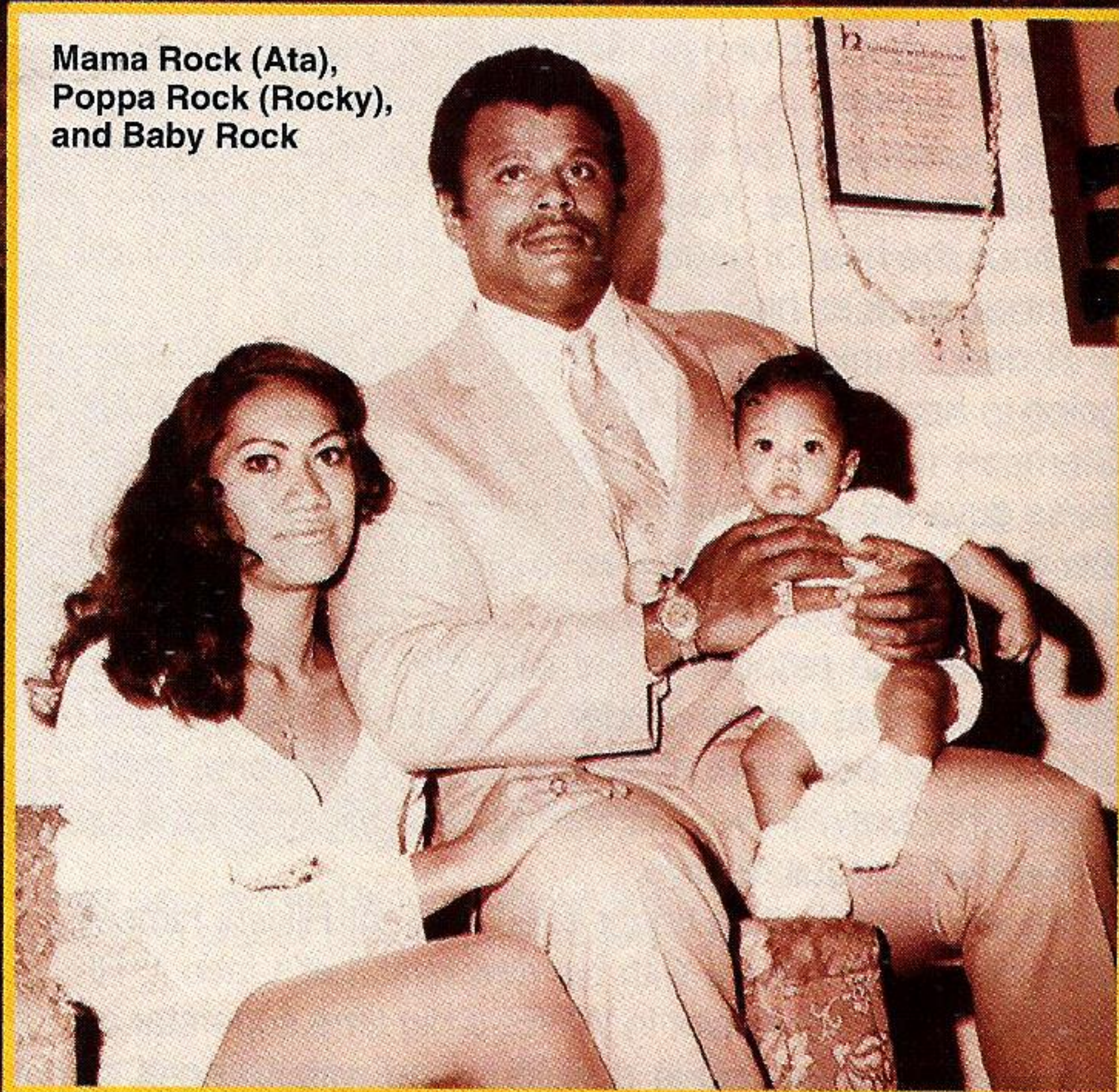


Within days of the WXW bloodletting, Rikishi was, as planned, back on tour with WWE and dealing with much bigger stars such as Hulk Hogan (top) and Goldust (above). If Rikishi looks a little angrier to you at times in WWE, maybe Gangrel had something to do with it. The incident in Allentown won't be so easy for him to forget.

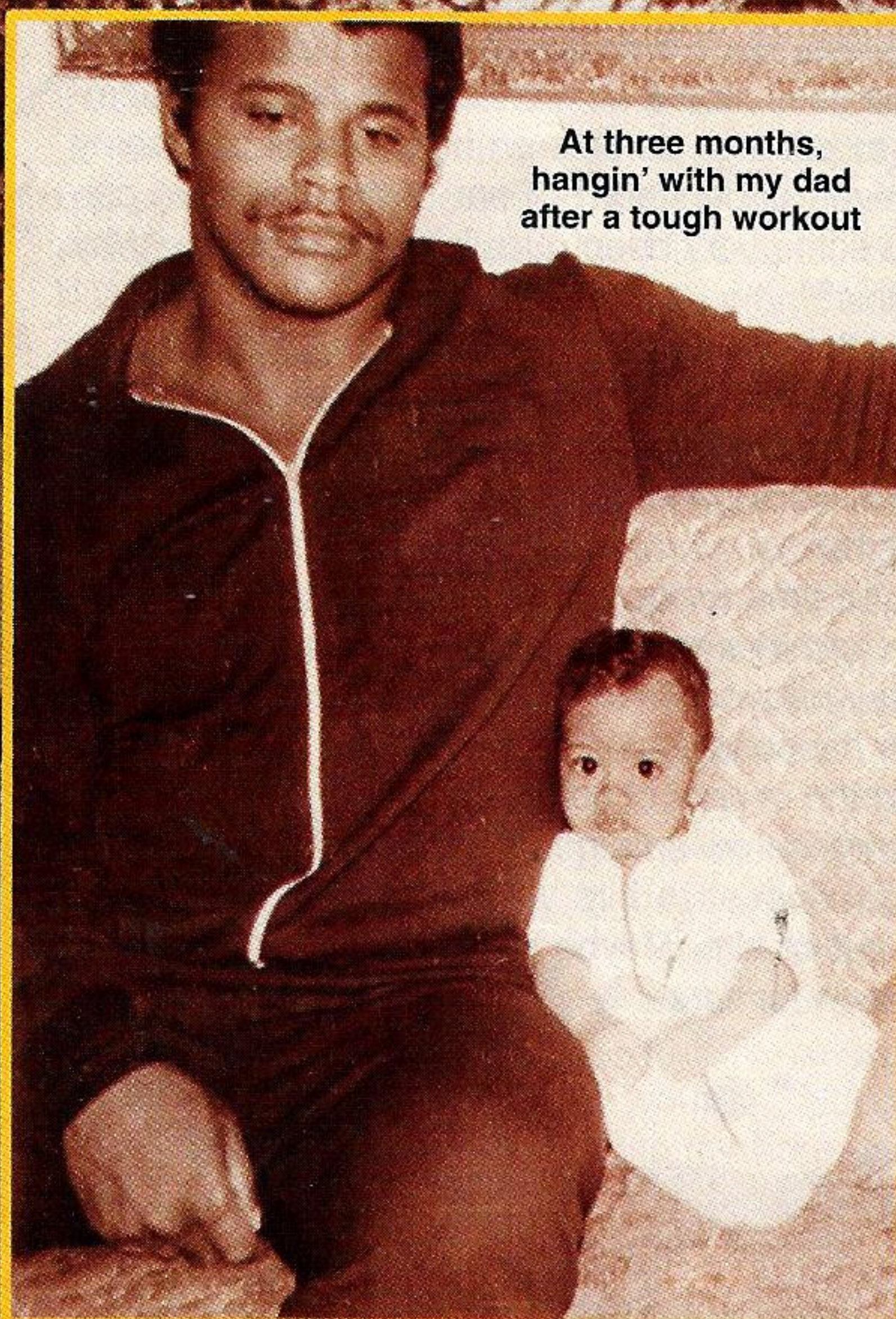
THE ROCK:



Mama Rock (Ata),
Poppa Rock (Rocky),
and Baby Rock



At three months,
hangin' with my dad
after a tough workout



SMACKED DOWN AND FIGHTING BACK

EDITOR'S NOTE: AFTER RECEIVING NUMEROUS REQUESTS OVER THE YEARS, *THE WRESTLER* IS PLEASED TO RE-RUN OUR SOLD-OUT "TRUE LIFE STORIES" SERIES, BEGINNING THIS ISSUE WITH THE ROCK.

TAMPA, FLORIDA. 1995.

The Phantom reached into his pants pocket and clutched the seven sweat-soaked dollar bills that threatened to burn a hole in that same pocket. Not that seven miserable bucks could burn much of a hole; seven clams could get you a standing-room-only spot in the most downtrodden arena to watch the most mediocre wrestling card ever presented.

But it was far from a six-figure pro football contract, The Phantom rued. And this was what this 24-year-old had on his person—a pittance and a ticket back to a life he thought he had left in 1990, the year in which he left his home in Allentown, Pennsylvania, to enroll at the University of Miami in Florida.

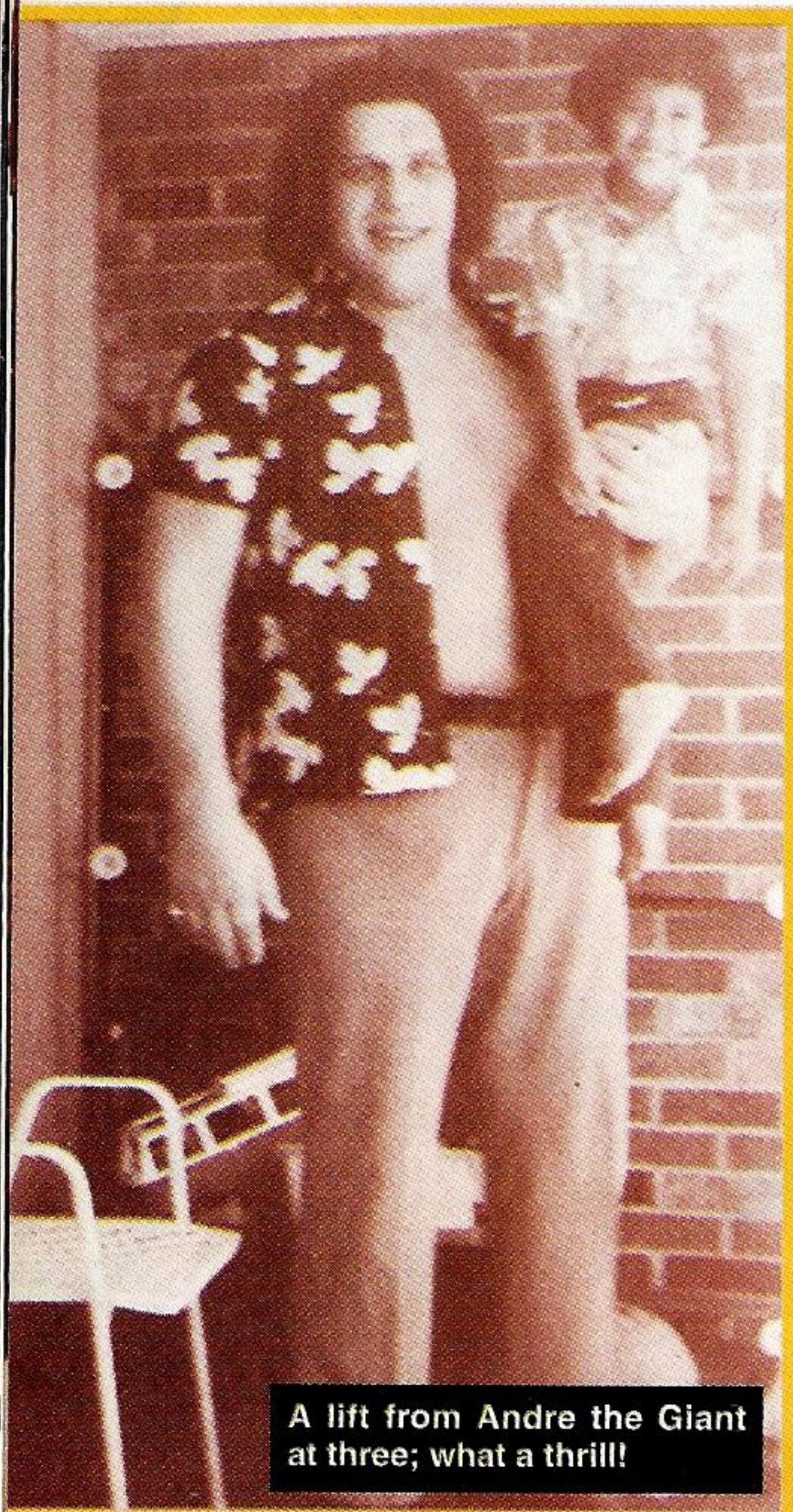
I left home six years ago, and now I've come back.

Dwayne Johnson, as The Phantom was better known, was returning

to the family nest with a sheepskin from Football U—a degree in exercise physiology and criminology. His heart beheld thrilling images of life in the trenches of Miami's venerable Orange Bowl garnered from a largely successful career as a defensive end on the Hurricanes' football team. His resume also included a year with Calgary of the Canadian Football League.

Now I have seven dollars to my name.

Seven months old, my first Christmas



A lift from Andre the Giant at three; what a thrill!

He was heading back to live with Mom and Dad, back to another sports microcosm, wrestling, into which he had been born. But now Johnson was heading to the mats himself to de-Phantomize himself and become somebody. The environment into which he now walked was rich with wrestling tradition: Johnson's father, Rocky, was a successful wrestler in the 1970s and 1980s. Peter Maivia, Dwayne's grandfather, had been a wrestling legend. Although both men had been stars during their tenures, neither had undertaken the daunting challenge Dwayne had accepted: to be both a pro wrestler *and* a pro football player.

Dwayne Johnson did not ask himself if he could be the Deion Sanders of the squared circle; he only wondered how long it would take.

Before arriving at his parents' Tampa apartment, Dwayne pulled out that seven-dollar stipend. *I will*

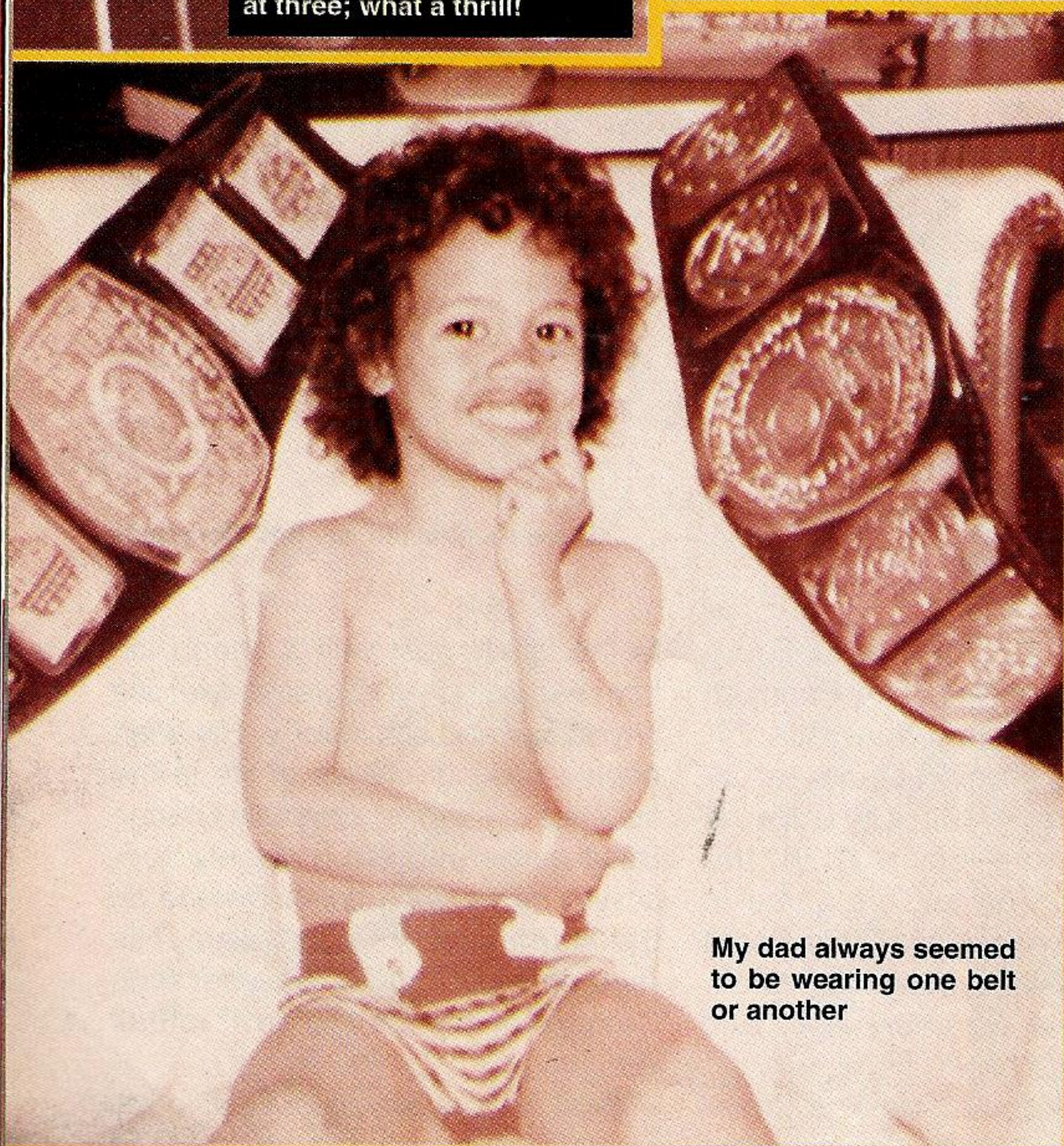
never forget where I came from, he thought. He also vowed never to take "no" for an answer and to work harder than any man alive.

He put his past behind him, the lonely days in Calgary, where he lived on a paltry \$400 Canadian a week—barely enough to buy chuck steak, much less the T-bone or New York strip he enjoyed. He stepped forward from a disappointing college senior year, degraded by a back injury that ultimately cost him a shot at the NFL.

A few days later, after establishing a daily training regimen with his father, now a truck driver with a liquor firm, Dwayne "locked up" for the first time. He knew he had found his calling.

He made a beeline for the telephone, called his Calgary coach, and said, "Thanks for the one year. I'll pass on the final two years of my contract."

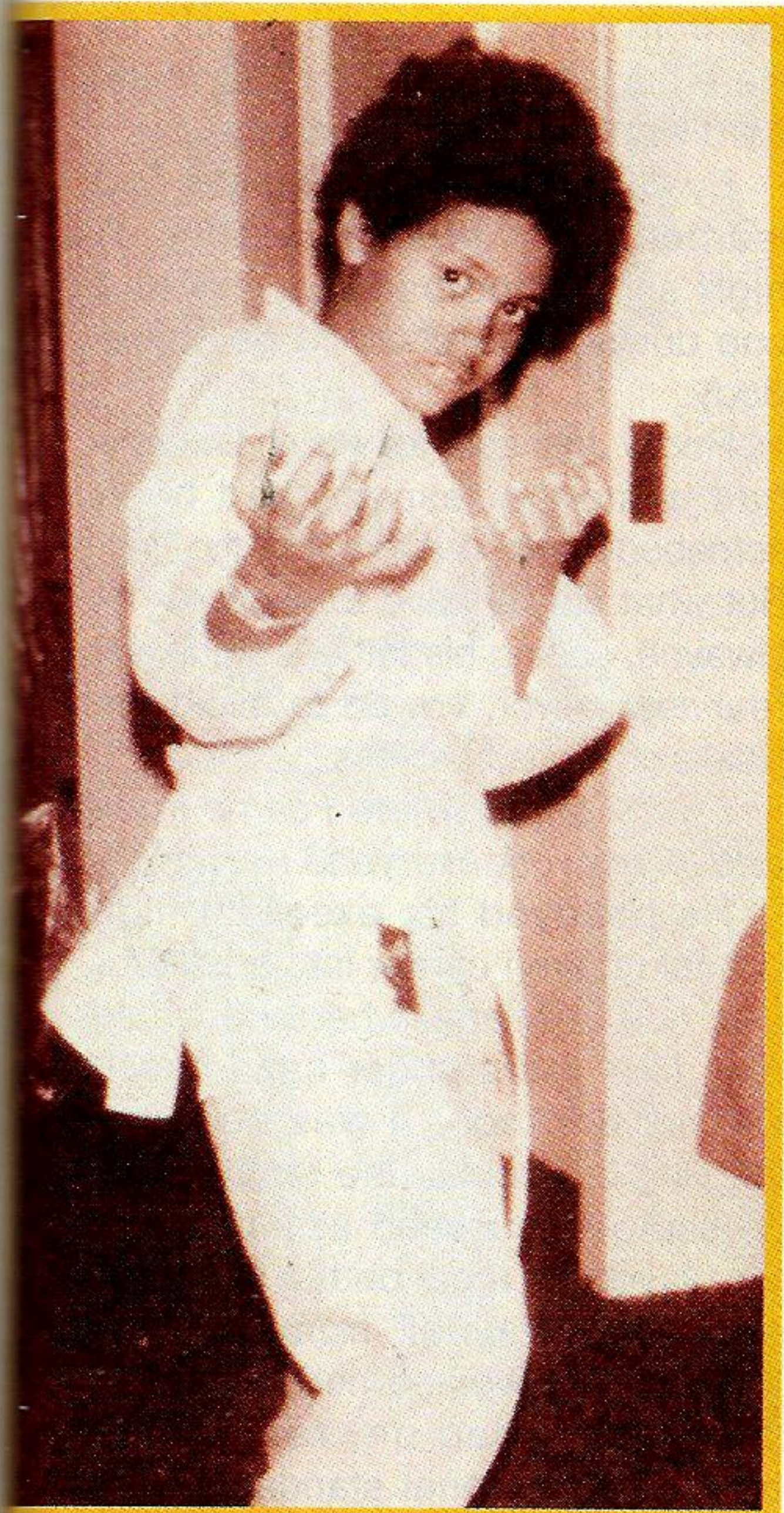
Then he committed himself to a full-time career in a sport that had



My dad always seemed to be wearing one belt or another



Three years old: Wonder wear The Rock got his good looks? Mama, of course!



I was into karate for all of 11 days ...until I got kicked in the mouth

first called his name when he was just six or seven.

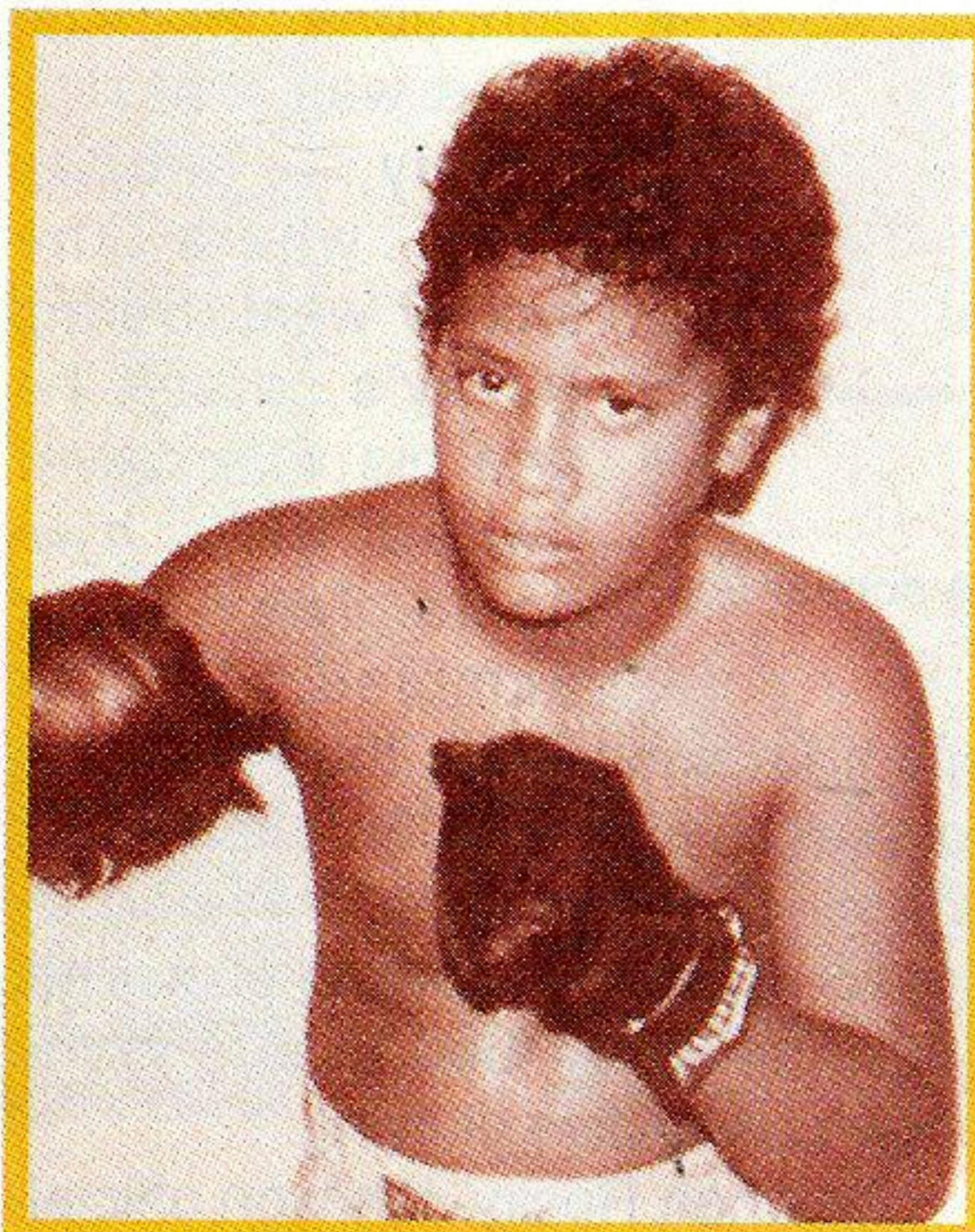
If I'm going to be the best, I will have to give 110 percent focus and commitment to this thing. He couldn't fail, for he knew that by outworking everyone else and focusing exclusively on success, he would win.

Training began each morning at six and continued *for three hours*. Then Johnson sprinted to his job as a personal trainer. The position afforded him the opportunity to work on the weights, and he happily availed himself of the excellent facilities. At 8 p.m., Johnson punched out, then raced back home to train on the mats with his father.

Day after day, the same routine. On the weekends, Rocky Johnson trained his son on wrestling techniques from dawn to dusk.

Then the whole process began

again on Monday. There was no turning back for Dwayne Johnson; there couldn't be, for he had no backup plan. He *knew* he would soon find his way into the squared circle. He could not predict, however, that within months he would take on the name Rocky Maivia. Nor could he have envisioned the joy he would feel in holding a wrestling audience in the palm of his hand.



Layin' some smack down at eight years old

Peter Maivia had held the wrestling world in his hand, as had his son-in-law, Rocky Johnson, the husband of Peter's daughter, Ata.

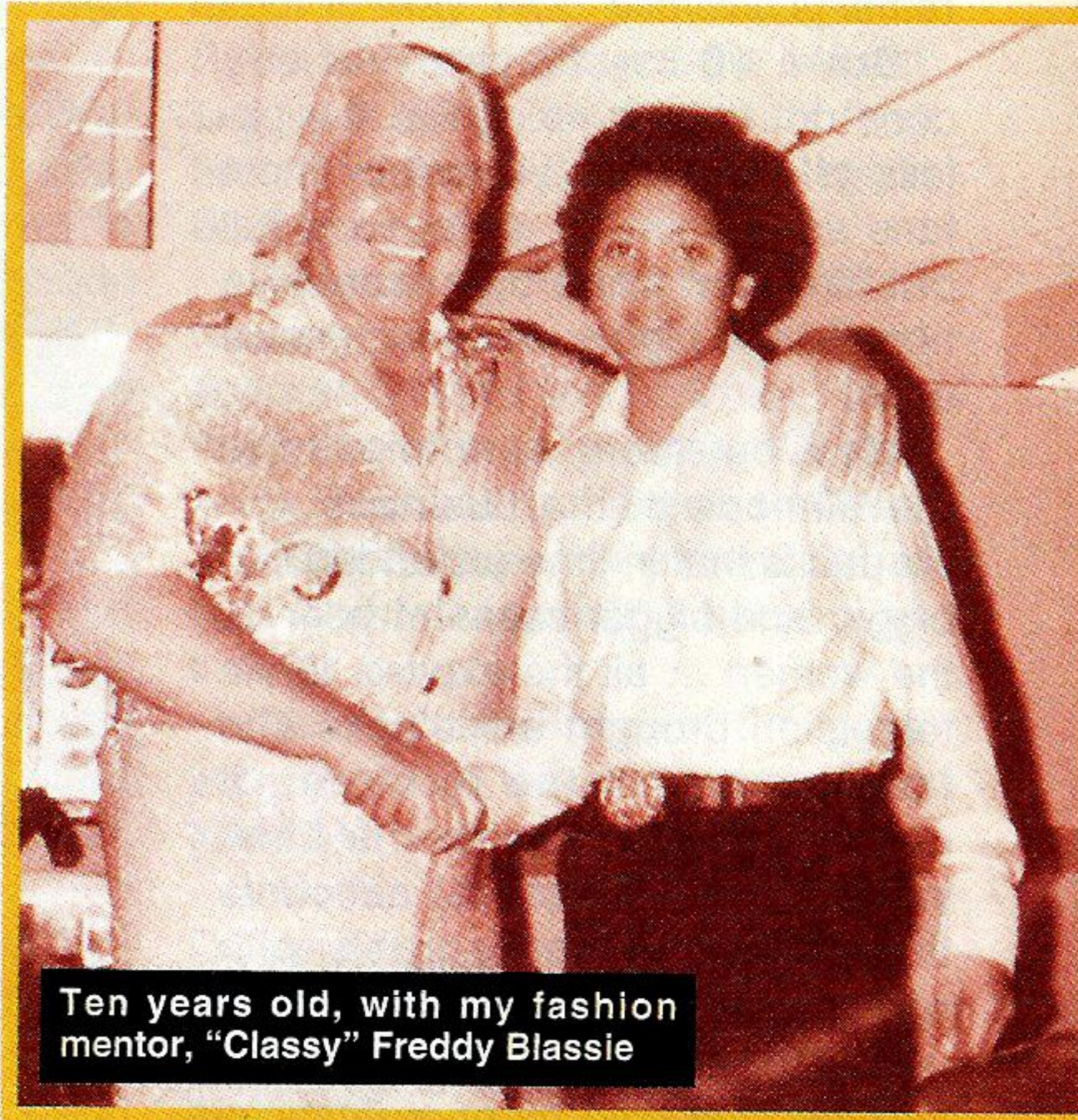
Growing up, Dwayne had witnessed first-hand this "palming of a wrestling crowd." Rocky, Ata, and Dwayne were one of the rare wrestling families that traveled together. In the 1970s (and through the mid-1980s), when wrestling territories still existed, grapplers usually resided in the state in which they wrestled. For the Johnsons, that meant tours in places as disparate as Hawaii (where Dwayne spent much of his youth), Florida, Georgia, and even New Zealand. All told, the Johnsons lived in some 15 different states.

For young Dwayne, it was a great life, albeit a quasi-transient one. What was not to like? Living in faraway places, meeting the wrestlers, seeing his dad conquer warriors like Mr. Fuji and Prof. Tanaka. Enjoying a cool show, then heading out to a steak joint—just him, Dad, and Mom—and chomping on the best steaks they could find. Idle time meant breaking out his wrestling toys, pretending *he* was the next great WWF champion. A headlock applied to the bedpost ... an elbowdrop to the poofy hypo-allergenic pillow that always bounced back when you smashed it in the gut.

Whenever he could get to a video store, Dwayne Johnson rented every wrestling video he could get his hands on: It was a practice he would continue throughout his own wrestling career.

You couldn't spend days crammed into little hotel rooms with Mom and Dad without having their morals rub off on you. Dwayne Johnson's childhood maintained an ongoing semblance of normalcy because Ata and Rocky instilled in their son ethics and a code of honor that he has carried with him all his life.

Ata was the backbone of the family, and Rocky was there to "lay



Ten years old, with my fashion mentor, "Classy" Freddy Blassie



A dance with my grandmother Lia at the NWA convention in Las Vegas in 1984

the smack down" when the time was right. His parents ensured that Dwayne stayed focused on his education: He averaged only two or three missed days of school a month. Since Rocky Johnson was a proud man, proud of his work ethic, proud of his ability to entertain a crowd, proud of his family, he saw to it that his son learned about family values, right and wrong, honor, and truth.

After you've made all the money and pleased all your fans, what remains is family.

But a 10- or 12-year-old boy does not always recognize the pitfalls of a business viewed by most fans as glamorous, as a world full of shiny new cars, big, expensive homes, and bigger, more expensive egos.

Most outsiders were blinded to the demons of the business, the six-packs that in time expanded into bigger and bigger cases of beer ... the women ... all the excess. While television brought anklelocks and face gouges to the forefront, it never found its way to the bank vaults, to the wrestlers' accounts that shrunk commensurably with each paycheck deposited.

Dwayne Johnson saw wrestling families shattered by poor financial

planning—bad investments, or worse, no investments. Over a period of years, he began to recognize that his parents had fallen into the same financial quagmire as so many other wrestlers.

The most puzzling aspect of the Johnsons' financial woes was that ultimately, nobody knew where the money went. During Rocky's career, he and his wife never owned their own home. They never gambled, never

spent lavishly. Sure, they had their road expenses, just like every other wrestler. Airfare was provided by the company, but nothing else. That left motel bills, food bills, and the other necessities of living.

But when Rocky Johnson officially retired from the sport, he was liv-

ing from paycheck to paycheck, as were his wife and his son. So much hard work, so little to show for it.

By age 18, Dwayne Johnson had learned some of life's lessons. A high school football star, he had one driving conviction: *to be somebody.*

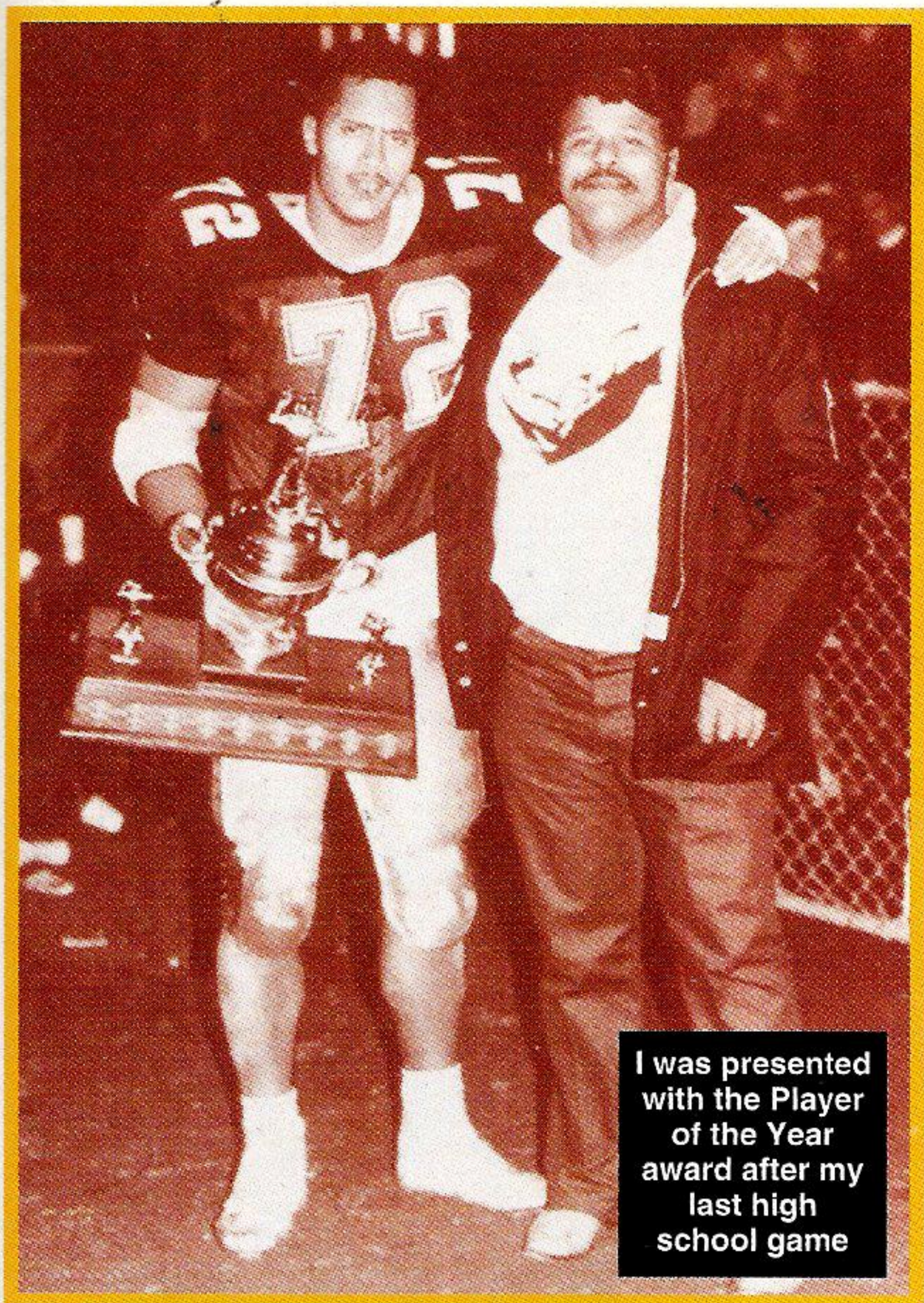
Rocky Johnson, for whom Dwayne had immense respect, had been somebody both in and out of the ring. But what did he have to show for it? Dwayne, seeing his father's life in the rearview mirror, vowed to avoid the pitfalls of sports business.

I won't forget where I came from, and I'll outwork everyone.

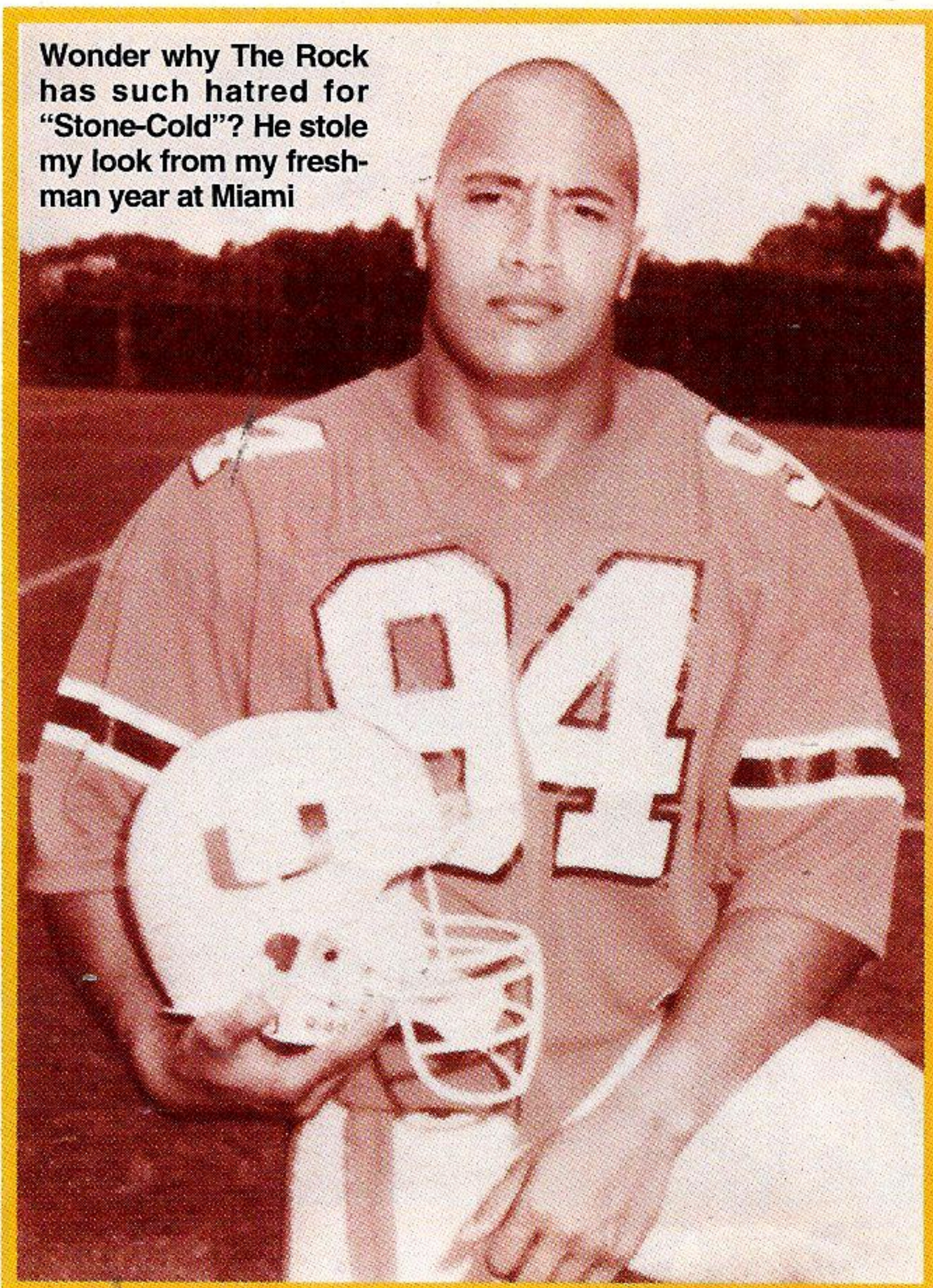
He parlayed his excellent high school gridiron career into a full athletic ride at Miami, where he would play four years under head coach Dennis Erickson. It was not easy juggling the books, the football, the pressure to succeed at Pigskin U. He played for a pat on the back and a "Yeah, Dwayne!" from the fans instead of a well-earned buck. But Johnson forged on; refusing to betray his personal standards, and practicing in 95-degree heat as if



Rocky and Ata Johnson: Good-looking couple, huh?



Wonder why The Rock has such hatred for "Stone-Cold"? He stole my look from my freshman year at Miami



there was no tomorrow. Many times, instead of heading back to his dorm room after practice, Johnson received intravenous fluids at a nearby hospital.

Starving financially and, to a degree, emotionally, Johnson refused to wilt. He was a preseason all-American entering his senior campaign, and an NFL career seemed like a distinct possibility.

But early in the 1995 football season, Johnson ruptured two disks in his back. He spurned surgery, choosing to rest the injury briefly and to play through the pain. On many flights home from road trips, Johnson was forced to rest in the aisle, for the excruciating pain prohibited him from sitting down. He made it from huddle to huddle and game to game on will and occasional shots of cortisone.

His subpar play told him he should have rested the injury for more than four days.

But that's college football, especially at this level.

The coaching staff had not ignored his injury, but never had Erickson, the team trainers, nor physician said, "Hey, what you need to do is you need to come back and you need to take this week off."

No one ever forced Johnson to sit and heal; ultimately, that cost him a shot at the Big Show.

Instead, he signed a three-year deal to play football in Canada. From high school in Allentown to college in Florida to the lonely world of Calgary. A preseason All-American a year earlier, a part-time bench-warmer in frigid Canada.

Everything happens for a reason. God has his plan for me.

By May 1996, when he still had not realized the fruits of his labor, the voice inside him (which he called "Be Somebody") beckoned him back to Tampa, to come full circle with his family.

And with the wrestling business.

After training intensively with his father, Dwayne got his shot at the squared circle and the WWF during

a tryout match against the Brooklyn Brawler in Corpus Christi, Texas. The WWF was impressed but wanted him to get more experience wrestling for a smaller federation. Dwayne got that experience in Memphis' USWA. He made his debut in May 1996 and, along with Bart Sawyer, captured the vacant tag team title in a tournament final from Brickhouse Brown and Reggie B. Fine by June.

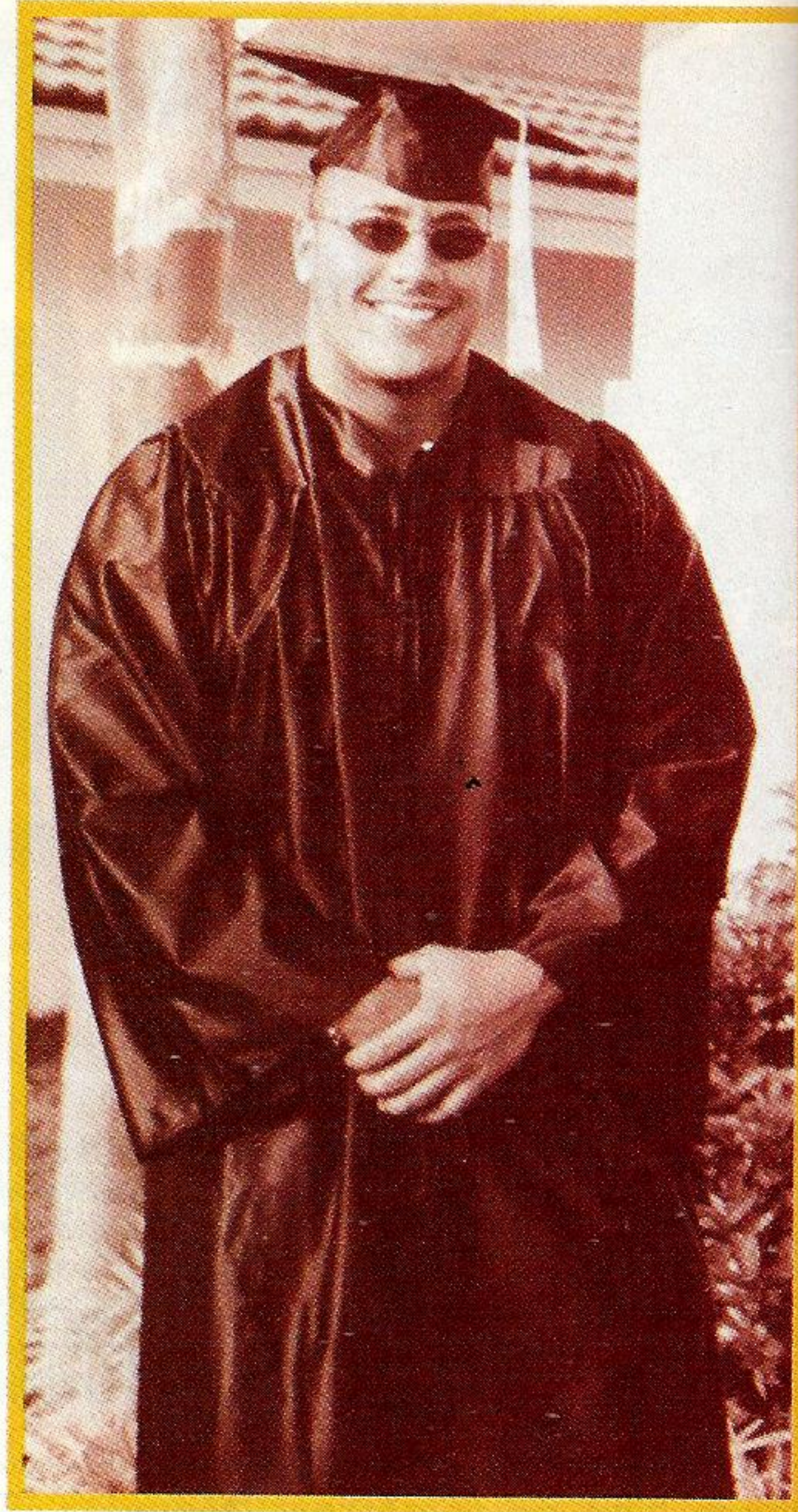
Dwayne returned to the WWF in November and was matched against Owen Hart in Ohio. Hart, then a veteran of seven WWF seasons, had been charged to "take Johnson through the paces." What Hart learned was that Johnson was the real thing.

"He's better than half the guys you've got in the ring now," Hart told WWF executives.

Like his father and grandfather, Dwayne had superior athletic skills and work ethic. He also had charisma and a sincere desire to learn and improve.



Miami vs. Florida State was always a thrill, but to be named Defensive Player of the Game ...



Cooler than the other side of the pillow: Graduation day from Miami, where I managed to finish in the top 10 percent of my class

The WWF signed him to a contract.

But there was one step to take before he could step into the ring for his WWF debut: He needed a name, a persona. He didn't want to continue to use the Flex Kavana name he adopted in Memphis. The name Dwayne Johnson was on the bland side.

The WWF suggested the Rocky Maivia persona.

"No way," responded Johnson. Although he held a deep respect for his family, Dwayne had forged his way through high school, college, and the CFL on his own. He was going to make it in the WWF the same way, not by prospering from his father's name and reputation. But his rebuke was met sharply by his father and his grandmother Lia (Peter Maivia had died in 1982).

"I'd rather be called Joey Smith," Johnson reaffirmed.

But after a cooling-off period, and after discussing the matter with his new wife, Dany, Dwayne realized that it wasn't the name that bothered him, but rather the possibility of duplicating his father's style. No Ali shuffle, no jabs, Dwayne insisted. Then he respectfully agreed to carry on the Maivia name.

Dwayne's first opportunity to display the persona of Rocky Maivia came during the November 1996 Survivor Series, held at New York's Madison Square Garden—the world's most famous arena. Seventeen thousand screaming maniacs wondered who this flashy, clean-cut guy was. Dwayne Johnson, a.k.a. Rocky Maivia, wasn't the least bit nervous, however. He had found his calling once

again, and now he was cashing in on those six penniless years.

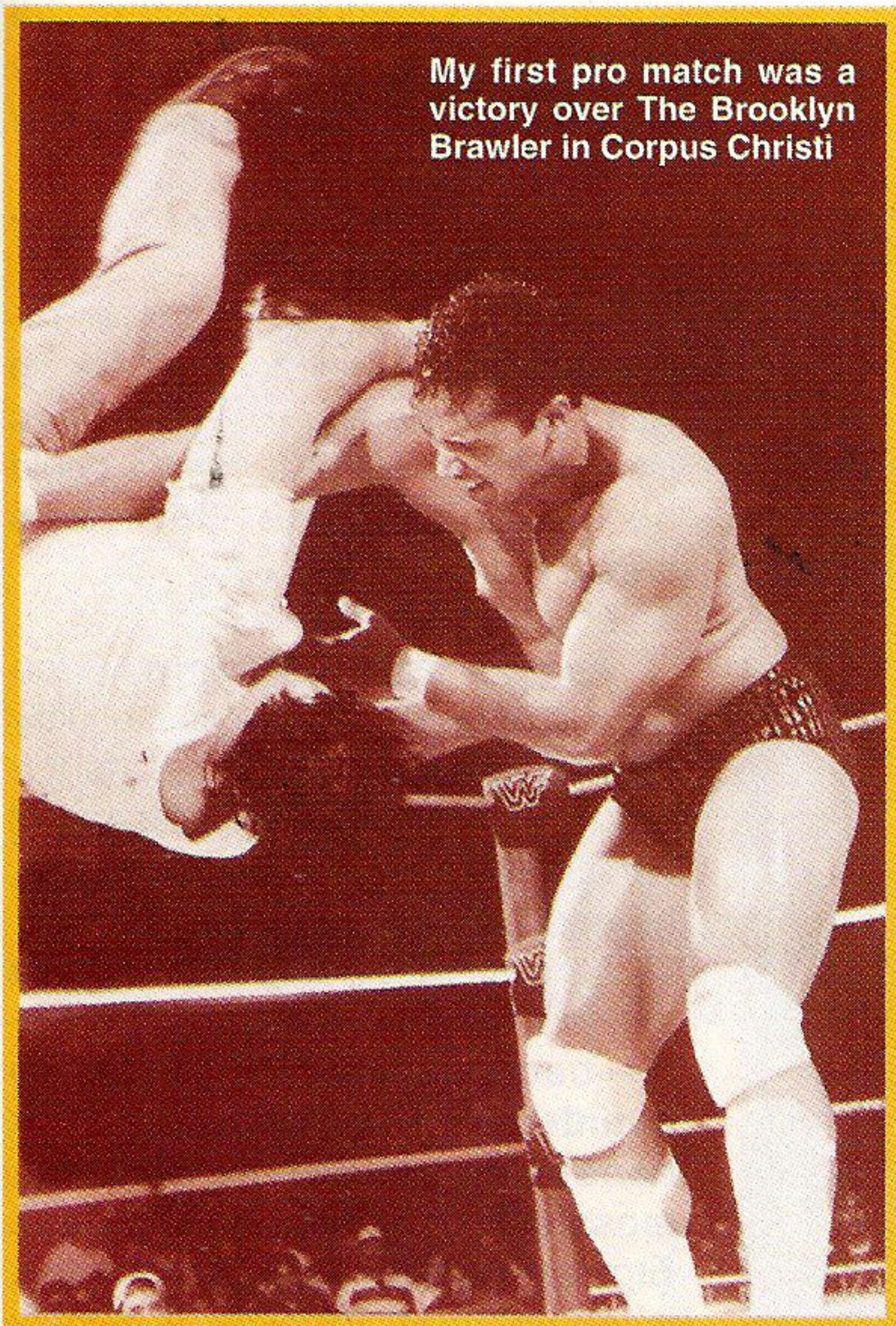
Dwayne Johnson had made it.

"Now I know how the fans feel when they are emotionally spent," Dwayne Johnson reflected in an electric Broadway theater, in the city in which he finally realized his dreams.

The final act of *The Phantom Of The Opera* had just concluded, and the actors were taking their bows. Johnson looked around and saw thousands of faces wearing masks of hypnotic delight.

My fans look the same way when I've put on a good show.

Johnson called it the "X-factor," that intangible that allowed the star to hold thousands of hearts and souls in his hands simply with a word or a raised eyebrow. Dwayne and his wife had just witnessed the



My first pro match was a victory over The Brooklyn Brawler in Corpus Christi



Rocky Sr., Ata, Dany, and The Rock

greatest of all shows; now they were among the cheering crowd, honoring the real Phantom with a rousing standing ovation. Adoring him.

The man on stage, paid to play the protagonist's role, was listed in the program's credits as The Phantom of the Opera. But when Dwayne gazed up at that stage at the show's hero, he saw not an actor, but himself, back at MSG, or on a pay-per-view, at center stage.

Start those chants. Show me how much you hate me.

With a shiver, Dwayne knew he was The Phantom, the man behind the mask worn by a character known as "The Rock."

"The Rock is [a jerk]," Johnson declares with a measure of authority. He should know. At WrestleMania XIV, the consistently selfish and impudent "Rock" told the

area's homeless to "stay off my finely manicured lawn."

That's what makes The Rock so successful—his utter disdain for anything wholesome and positive. It is also what makes Dwayne Johnson/The Rock a paradox.

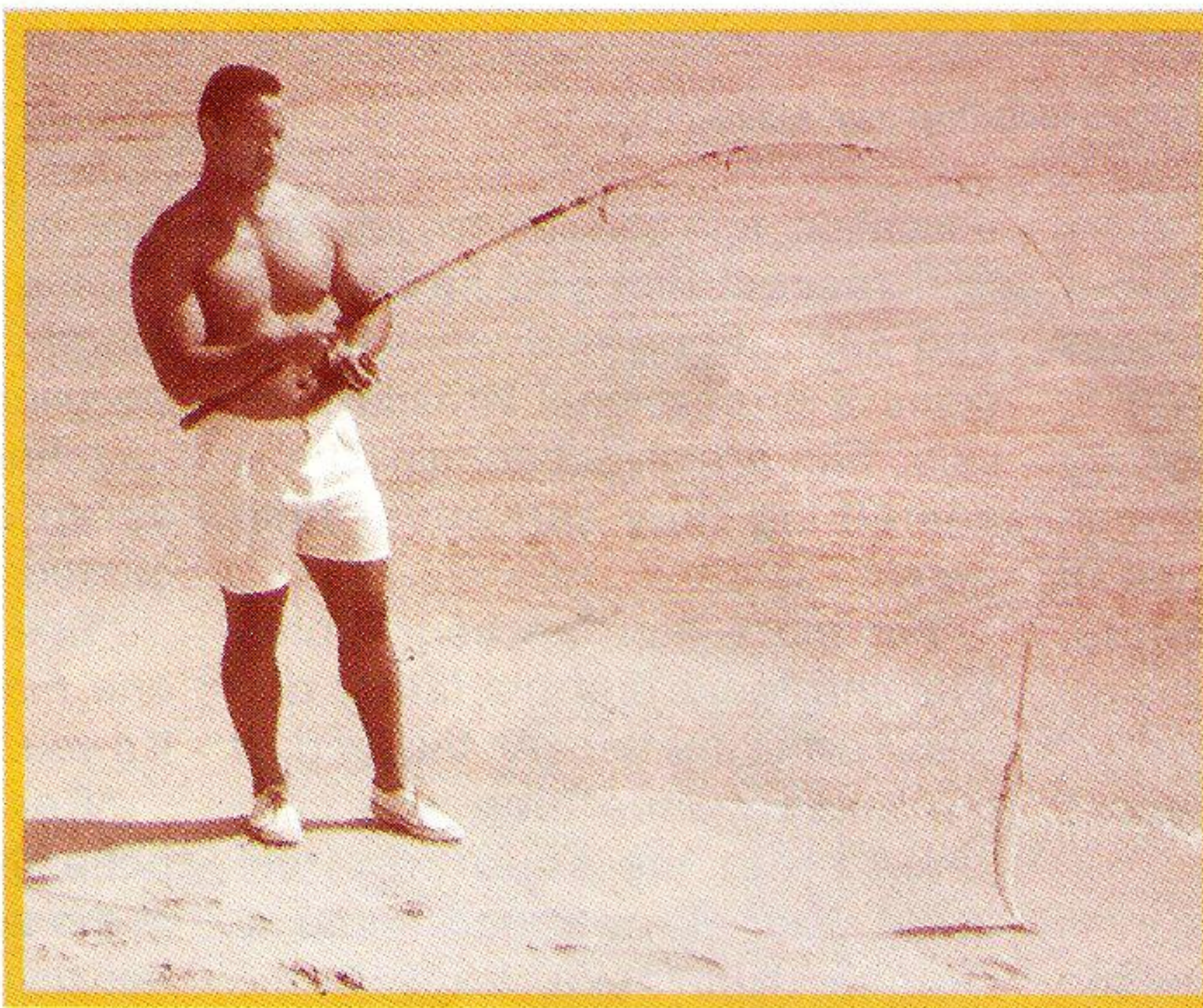
"Of course the homeless problem is a big problem," he admits. "I feel for it; it's unbelievable. We

have money for wars. We don't have money for the poor."

If Johnson seems sensitive to the struggles of the less fortunate, it's because he refuses to forget where he came from. From that four-month period in Tampa, training day and night ... to the day he arrived with a soggy roll of dollars. Since his high school and college days, he has participated in anti-drug programs; today, hardly a day passes when he isn't visiting a sick or drug-dependent child at an area hospital.

"It goes back to the saying, 'If I could help just one kid ...' I've gotten a lot of responses, whether through the mail or through parents, things like how I've influenced kids. To me, that's important."

"Get your high school diploma first," Dwayne Johnson said to the 16-year-old young man who sat before him.



Setting a fishing record—the world's smallest barracuda



Dany and The Rock—wedding day, May 3, 1997

Johnson had heard the story before: Here was yet another teenager entertaining wild notions of quitting school, joining the WWF, and making a nifty six-figure salary before he was 20. This young man was just another in a long list of potential high school dropouts, except this time, his parents contacted Johnson for help.

"Set him straight," the teenager's father had pleaded.

So now Johnson was giving it his level best, imparting the Johnson code in order to save the teen's

education, and possibly his future.

"I respect that you have goals and aspirations and want to become a professional wrestler," he said. "But a high school diploma is something they can never take away."

For more than an hour, Johnson, the teen, and his father discussed the matter. At the end of the meeting, the teen was convinced that the squared circle could wait. He returned home to Omaha, Nebraska, back to his homeroom and his textbooks.

Over the next few months, he wrote to Johnson. "I'm still in school, still doing okay. I'll get my diploma."

His father even wrote to Johnson: "Thank you."

Neither father nor son ever requested that Johnson write back; in fact, as the calendar year flipped from 1997 to 1998, Johnson could no longer remember the teen's name. It didn't matter.

To save one person...

As tough as it is for Dwayne to forget where he came from, it is equally difficult for him to allow others to forget their past, to ignore lessons at hand. You learn lessons every day, he says, unless you live under a rock.

Perhaps that is why Dwayne Johnson is an unknown commodity—because wrestling fans are deluded into thinking The Rock does reside under the stickiest, mossiest of emotional boulders. Ergo, since The Rock is Johnson, it follows that Johnson is also a pariah. But there are those rare moments when someone in just the right town and at just the right restaurant will emerge from the lobby at just the right time.

Recently, such an incident occurred, at a restaurant, on the road, where Johnson was approached by a couple who looked to be in their 20s.

"Hi, I'm your biggest fan," said the woman, a sheepish smile adding to her simple beauty. "Would you sign this?"

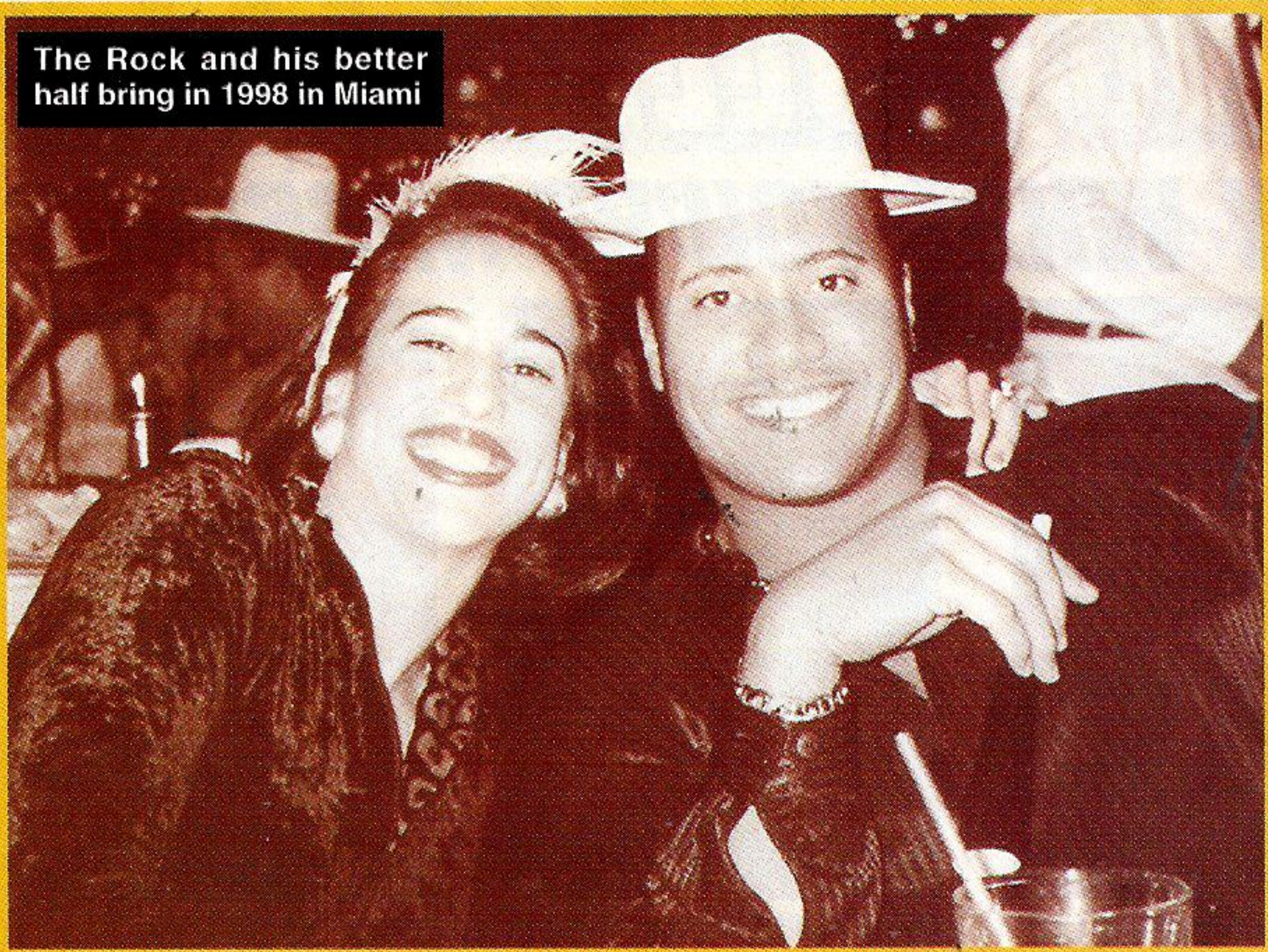
"No problem," said Johnson. He cast the woman's partner a glance. *This guy looks funky*, Johnson thought. *His testosterone's going uggghhhh.*

Johnson smiled and signed the scrap of paper the woman had offered. Suddenly, the man spoke.

"She always told me if there was one man she would leave me for, it's you."

"For me?" blushed Johnson, honestly flattered. He looked over at the woman, down her slim arm to her delicate hand. A diamond ring shimmered back at him.

The Rock and his better half bring in 1998 in Miami



"Let me ask you something," Johnson said as the couple was walking away. The man turned back and shot a *what, are you trying to steal my wife?* look at the wrestler with the deep, silky voice. "Are you engaged?"

"Yeah, we're engaged," shot back the woman.

"I think that's wonderful!"

The pair stared at Johnson as if he were the Grinch wearing a Santa's suit.

"Oh, man, I just got married, and it's our anniversary!" grinned "The Rock."

Dany Johnson is the financial whiz of the family, the sentinel over her and her husband's finances. She should be, because at age 29, she is a senior financial analyst for Merrill Lynch. She and The Rock met eight years ago when she was just starting with the firm.

"Here I was, a bug just out of high school, thinking I was a superstud," laughs Johnson. "Here I am trying to convince this woman to listen to me. 'I'm the one

for you for the rest of your life.' It was a tough thing to do."

Fortunately, Dany grew to love Dwayne Johnson, not "The Rock." Theirs is a love stretched not by miles, but steeled by a sense of faith in each other and their place together. They are family, much as Ata and Rocky and Dwayne were. They occasionally travel together, sometimes to PPVs or occasionally to other important shows. But mainly it's The Rock on the road, "The Cornerstone" back at home.

Their marriage works for a few reasons. They have learned from the mistakes of their elders, and they don't make things more difficult than they are. Dany Johnson, like her mother-in-law, knows that at the end of a night's work, her husband will shower, drive to the nearest steakhouse, and wolf down a tenderloin and baked potato.

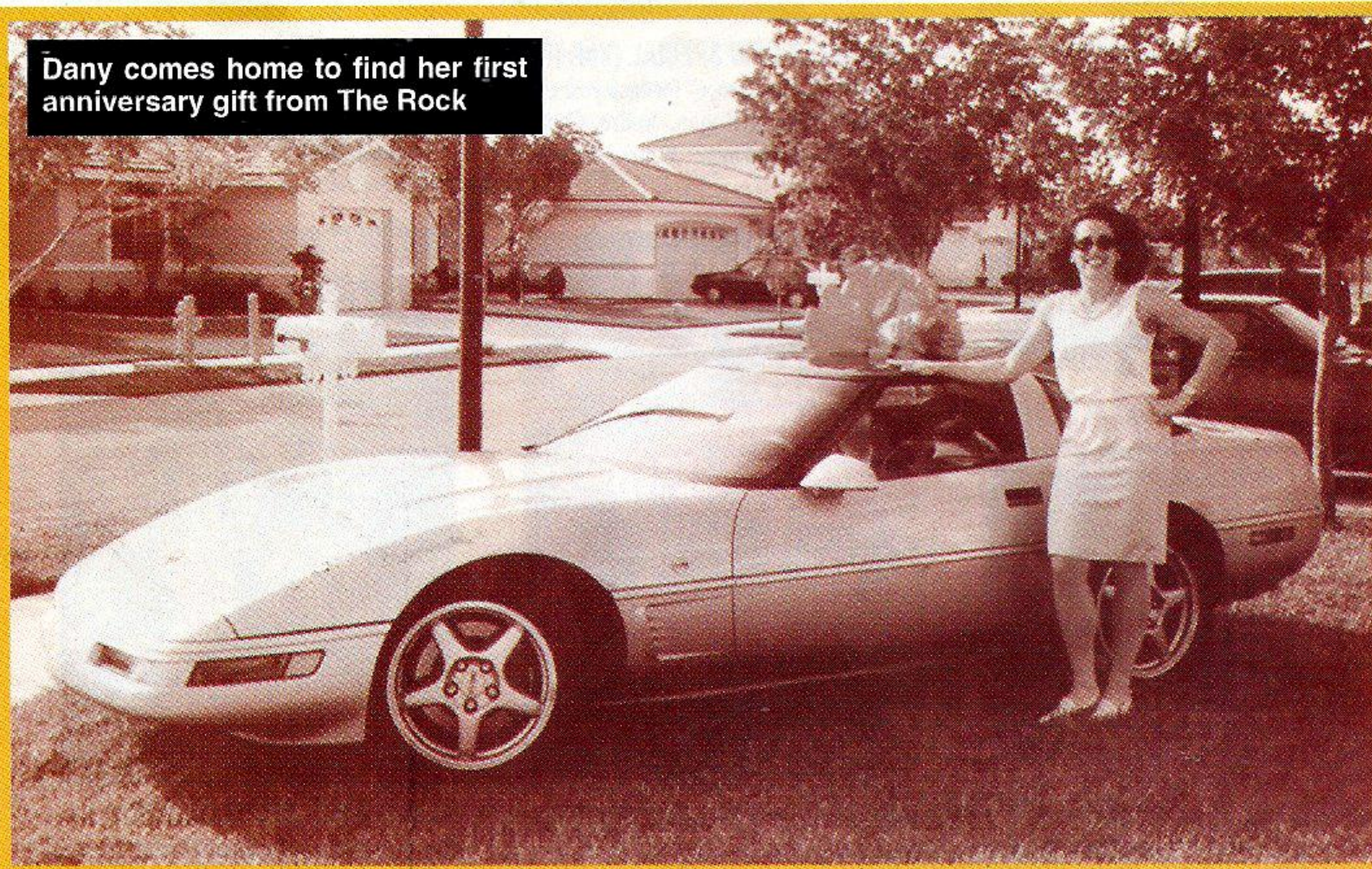
Then he will return to his hotel room and call her; she will feel his warmth, his love.

After a few days on the road, Dwayne Johnson will leave The Rock on a faraway turnbuckle to return home to Florida. To Rocky and Ata, to Dany. He has money now, lots of it. More than he ever dreamed of having. But he never strutted into the squared circle with that olive skin, those chop sideburns, and those damned psychotic eyes just to make some bucks.

I want to be somebody.

He has become somebody, not because "The Rock's" popularity translates into money for the company. And not because of a new car, new home, and new bride. It is because when the spoils of success threaten to burn a \$100,000 hole in his Armani pants pocket, he still has his family to which he can come back. □

Dany comes home to find her first anniversary gift from The Rock



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WRESTLER OF THE WEEK
 The WWE's most popular star, Rob Van Dam, was named the Wrestler of the Week for his performance in the main event of the WWE SmackDown! pay-per-view on June 11. Van Dam defeated The Undertaker in a hard-fought battle that lasted over 20 minutes.

MATCH OF THE WEEK
 The match of the week was the main event of the WWE SmackDown! pay-per-view on June 11, where Rob Van Dam defeated The Undertaker. The match was a classic example of professional wrestling, with both wrestlers displaying incredible athleticism and skill.

YAY AND NAY
 The WWE's most popular star, Rob Van Dam, was named the Wrestler of the Week for his performance in the main event of the WWE SmackDown! pay-per-view on June 11. Van Dam defeated The Undertaker in a hard-fought battle that lasted over 20 minutes.

WWE STARS' CAR FLIPS; AVOID SERIOUS INJURIES

Two WWE stars, Rob Van Dam and The Undertaker, were involved in car accidents on June 11. Van Dam's car flipped over on a highway, but he was not seriously injured. The Undertaker's car also flipped over, but he was also not seriously injured. The accidents occurred while the stars were traveling to a WWE event.



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YOUR LETTERS

(Continued from page 5)



Rob Van Dam and Sabu (with manager Bill Alfonso) won a lot of matches and collected a lot of gold together in ECW. Reader James McFadden will always considers them, not The Hardy Boyz, the true Team Extreme.

BRIDGES NEVER BURNED

Sometimes personal conflicts make it impossible to be professional, and that is obviously what happened to Steve Austin. He let down a lot of fellow WWE employees, friends, and fans by walking out on the *Raw* brand. By walking out, Austin actually did a favor for WWE, saving it from the bad publicity that would stem from his domestic disturbance a week later.

At this juncture of his career, Austin doesn't need to be in the spotlight. His personal life made it difficult for him to carry out his responsibilities in WWE. Vince McMahon acts as if he won't let Austin back anytime soon ... unless "Stone-Cold" makes plenty of apologies. But I look at Hulk Hogan and wonder if the same open-door policy will be granted to Austin.

I will miss "Stone-Cold's" presence on WWE shows. Right now, though, it's time for him to figure out how to deal with his real life and then return to entertaining us someday. WWE has enough talent to survive. But I hope to see Austin again ... when he's ready. WWE should be ready to welcome him back, too.

JEFFREY WINNER
 Oxford, NY

THE REAL TEAM EXTREME

I am not happy about the letter entitled "Team Extreme Reigns Supreme" that was included in the September 2002 issue of *THE WRESTLER*. That is because The Hardy Boyz are *not* the true Team Extreme. That moniker should be reserved for only one team: Sabu and Rob Van Dam.

Look at their record. They beat The Dudley Boyz, The Impact Players, Danny Doring and Roadkill, and many others. RVD has beaten Jeff Hardy on at least two occasions. Sabu destroyed Sid Vicious, survived a barbed-wire match against Terry Funk, and battled The Sandman in a "Stairway To Hell" match. Could either Matt or Jeff live through that kind of carnage? I don't think so.

JAMES McFADDEN, USMC
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WHAT'S HAPPENING

(Continued from page 7)

wife **Debra**. Austin was charged with misdemeanor assault in connection with a domestic incident with Debra in June, but Debra did not press charges against him. It was a judge who issued the arrest warrant.

Matt Hardy's new "Mattitude" persona might be just what he needs to break out of the slump he has been in for most of 2002. Now that the heel Hardy has jumped to *Smackdown*, it opens the door for potential matches against **Rey Misterio Jr.**, **The Hurricane**, **Tajiri**, and **Jamie Noble**.

Former mid-carder **Tiger Ali Singh** is suing WWE for \$7-million for religious and ethnic harassment. According to a story in the *New York Post*, Singh (real name **Gurjit Singh Hans**) claims WWE employees desecrated one of his turbans (considered sacred in the Sikh religion) and tore another turban "into pieces backstage and placed it on the head of a mentally disturbed person for the 'amusement' of the WWE personnel present." Singh, a resident of Ontario, Canada, also said WWE perpetuated the stereotype of people of Indian descent as likely being taxi drivers or convenience store operators.

WWE attorney **Jerry McDevitt** said the company was not aware of any harassment Singh may have suffered and is not responsible for Singh's career-ending injury, which he said happened when he was forced to wrestle in a pouring rain at an outdoor card last year. The injury, McDevitt pointed out, occurred in a match in a different promotion. "People make all kind of claims against the WWE, and when you get to the facts, you find that they're seldom found to be true," McDevitt told the *Post*.

Finally, here's yet another reason to love indy wrestling. During a recent Buffalo Championship

Wrestling card that I attended, **Killer Kumpf** powerslammed **The Crusher** with enough force to break the ring supports in half, destroying the ring. With no ring and several advertised matches remaining, **H.C. Loc**, **Hellicat**, and **Ian Decay** battled **Jason Atlas**, **Rik Matrix**, and Ring of Honor's **Mean Marcos** in a thrilling, blood-drenched falls-count-

anywhere-in-South Buffalo streetfight. The finish saw Marcos dive off a 10-foot high ledge onto Decay, proving that a little creativity can overcome just about any obstacle.

That's what's happening. Catch ya again next issue.

(Dan Murphy can be reached via e-mail at irishdan@concentric.net.) □



Tiger Ali Singh (shown in a 1999 WWF dark match against Kurt Angle) made news for the first time in a long time when he filed a \$7-million lawsuit against WWE this summer.

NO HOLDS BARRED

(Continued from page 10)



The four-word comment Paul Heyman had for wwe.com sums up the Bischoff situation pretty darn well. Heyman and Bischoff got to know each other when both worked in WCW more than a decade ago, but it's doubtful that either expected they'd work together again. Bischoff could be a huge asset to Vince McMahon, and not just as an on-air talent.

matter. A simple knockdown won't give him the bout, either. In order to win the match, he needs to muster whatever strength and power he has left and deliver a decisive knockout blow.

Eric Bischoff is Vince McMahon's most desperate haymaker yet.

McMahon's hiring of Bischoff is a sound corporate decision. Wrestling fans love controversy, and Bischoff might be the most controversial employee in WWE history. His hiring should drive diehard wrestling fans and all their on-the-fence friends to WWE TV every Monday and Thursday night. Bischoff could turn out to be WWE's savior, the man who turns *Raw* into must-see TV once again.

Of course, it's entirely possible that that won't happen. As president of WCW, Bischoff was bold and daring. He was one of the most cocksure executives on the face of

the planet. "I have an enormous ego," Bischoff once told me, "and I do everything within my power to feed it." If I know Bischoff, being an on-air talent without any real backstage stroke isn't going to feed that enormous ego for long. He wants power. He's addicted to it. And I highly doubt that McMahon is looking to relinquish even the tiniest bit of his power today, tomorrow, next month, or even next year.

In that kind of creative vacuum, Bischoff could find himself extremely bored extremely fast. If things don't start going his way in a relatively short period of time, we could find Bischoff simply going through the motions.

Fortunately, Bischoff brings more to the table than a strong on-air character. He has a strong mind for the business. He knows what works and what doesn't work. And he brings a truckload of perspective. See, Bischoff knows what it's like to fail on a grand scale—and he knows why he failed.

It's all about the Benjamins.

One of the reasons that Bischoff was successful was because he had a large bank account with which to work. He was able to sign away many of WWE's top names and give them guaranteed contracts. While I don't think he bought his way to the top, having the money to lure wrestlers like Scott Hall and Kevin Nash away from McMahon helped put WCW over the top. (Would there have been an NWO without Hall or Nash at the helm? Of course not.)

Sadly, not only did WCW fail to remain at the top, it didn't even remain a viable entity. The economic faults of Bischoff's "spend-now, spend-later" management approach came to light once WCW's popularity started faltering and its revenue began falling frighteningly short of its expenditures. Its big-ticket contracts began pummeling the company, and the product was unable to sustain itself.

If Bischoff truly wants to help McMahon, he'll do more than just serve as *Raw*'s on-air general manager. He'll warn him about the pitfalls of opening up WWE's vaults as a way to spur growth, something that McMahon has done with growing frequency of late. Hulk Hogan, Nash, Hall, and Bischoff himself didn't come cheap. The coffers need to be closed before the spending turns into spillage.

Once upon a time, Eric Bischoff ran a financially powerful company with the greatest roster in the history of the sport. It failed. Now Vince McMahon is running a billion-dollar company with what is considered the other greatest roster in the history of the sport, and he has Eric Bischoff on his payroll.

Learn your lessons well, Vince. Your new general manager can teach you an awful lot. What a bleeping business, indeed.

(Will Welsh can be reached via e-mail at willwelsh@comcast.net.)

His first major test was Jersey Championship Wrestling's J-Cup. He won that tournament, which immediately placed him among the indy circuit's top cruiserweights again. But was that merely a fluke? Reckless didn't think so, and looked forward to MCW's Shane Shamrock Cup on July 17 to prove it wasn't.

Unlike the ECWA Super 8 and other tournaments, the Shamrock Cup consists of five qualifying bouts that lead to a six-way elimination match. The winner of the previous year's event receives a bye directly into the six-way.

Xavier scored an upset in the first qualifying bout by pinning 2000 Shamrock Cup winner Qenaan Creed after nailing a spectacular 450 splash. Adam Flash disgusted the crowd before his qualifying match against

Johnny Kashmere by pledging to urinate in the Cup later that night, and then do the same to Shane Shamrock's grave. Unfortunately, the former MCW heavyweight champ defeated Kashmere to advance in the tournament.

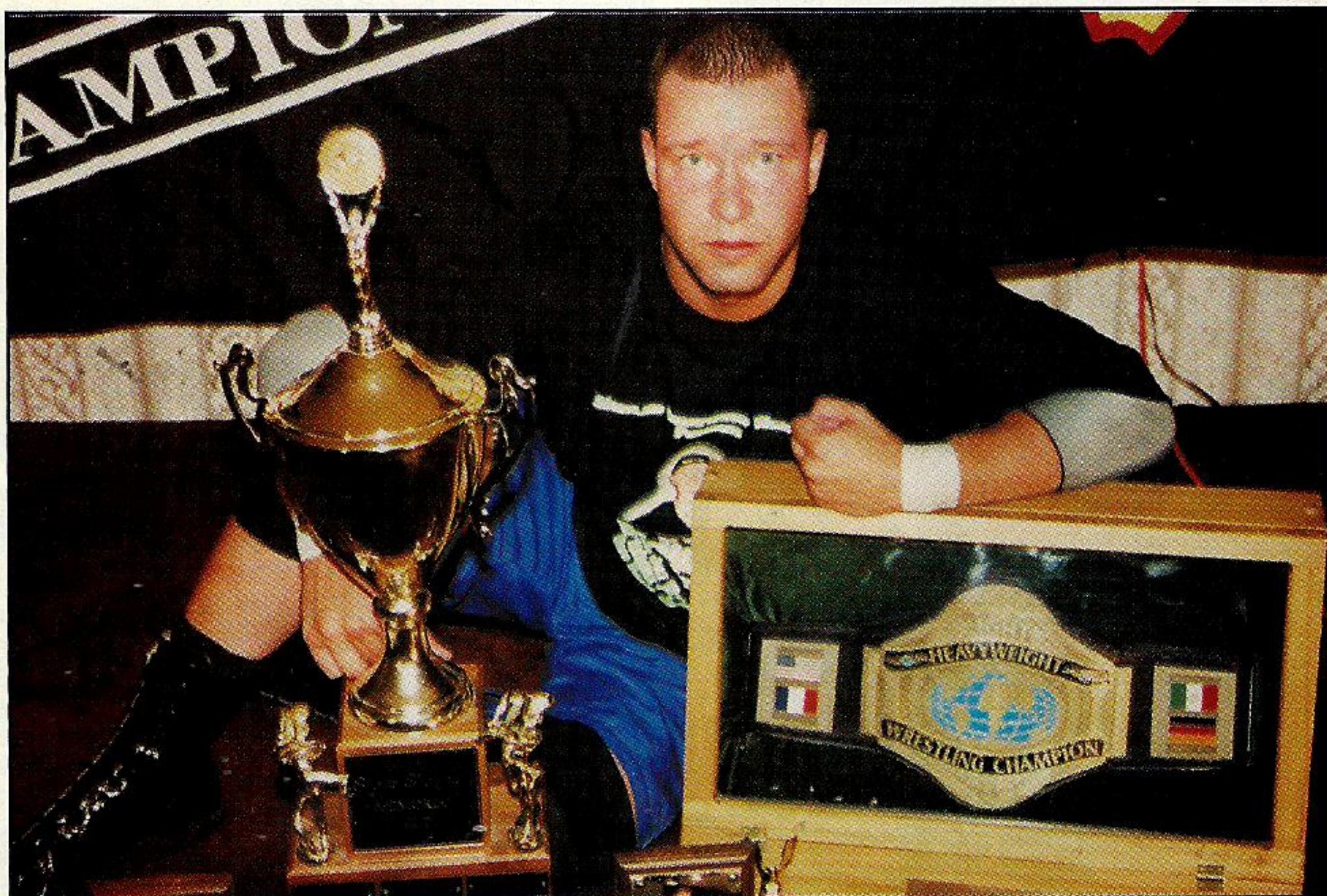
Then came Reckless Youth's match against Carney. Because of his exposure on *Tough Enough 2*, Carney had already gained far more mainstream exposure than Reckless. MTV couldn't help Carney under the chandeliers at Michael's Eighth Avenue, however, as Reckless welcomed the "Danimal" to the real world with a Northern lights 2K1.

Two qualifying bouts were left. Trent Acid renewed his old Combat Zone Wrestling feud with "Softcore" Nick Berk in the fourth match. Acid stunned Berk with a yakuza kick after a hard-fought contest. Next, Quiet Storm—considered the dark horse of the event—met MCW cruiserweight champion The Amazing Red, who had won over Maryland fans at the 2001 Shamrock Cup. Red kept the Storm quiet with his finisher, the standing shooting star press.

The participants in the six-way elimination match were set: Xavier, Flash, Reckless, Acid, Red, and the 2001 Shamrock Cup winner, Joey Matthews.

Adam Flash spoiled the sportsmanlike feel of the Cup at the outset by slapping Matthews, one of Shamrock's best friends. Matthews returned the slap even harder. The match threatened to degenerate into a brawl until Matthews tagged Reckless, who helped Matthews execute a double X-factor onto Flash.

A groggy Flash tagged Trent Acid. After they traded



Yes, Reckless Youth is definitely back, and his brilliant performance at the Shane Shamrock Cup indicates that he wants to again be known as one of the hottest stars on the independent circuit. Fans of Maryland Championship Wrestling, which has never been known as a "home" promotion for Reckless, showed their appreciation of him when it was over.

chops, Reckless went for the first pin attempt, but Acid kicked out. Later, Reckless also went for the first high-risk move of the six-way, flattening all of his opponents with a dive onto the arena floor—the same move that caused his injury.

Matthews collared Acid with the Virginia necktie to score the first pinfall. Xavier missed a 450 splash and was pinned by Flash. Red eliminated Matthews with his trademark standing shooting star press. Alexis Laree ensured Flash wouldn't win the event by running into the ring and nailing him with a tornado DDT. Reckless pinned Flash.

That left Reckless and Red, who was actually considered the favorite to win the Cup. Wrestlers gathered at ringside as Red kicked out of a Reckless driver, and Reckless escaped the InfraRed. Finally, Reckless caught Red in the Irish cloverleaf, Shane Shamrock's finishing hold, and forced the diminutive star to submit. For the first time, someone who was not an MCW regular had won the Shamrock Cup.

The loud cheers indicated the 1,500 fans in attendance didn't care. "I'm the one blessed tonight," he told the crowd. "I'm blessed to have worked with these guys in the ring, and to have wrestled for each and every one of you."

Reckless was too humble on this night to proclaim himself "King Of The Independents" again. But that didn't matter. The MCW fans had done it for him.

(Harry Burkett can be reached via e-mail at HBurkettJr@excite.com.)

CORRESPONDENTS REPORTS

(Continued from page 16)

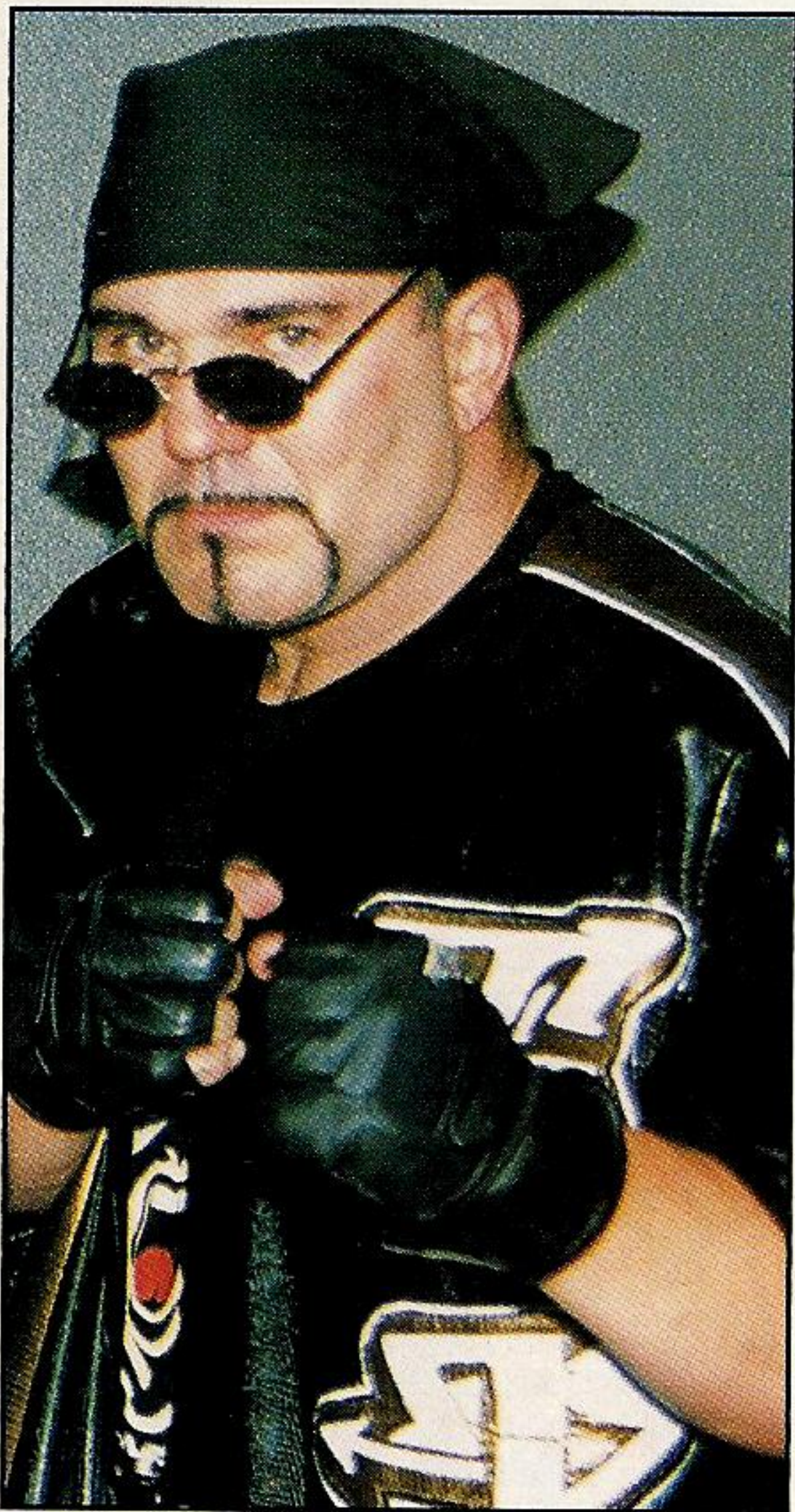
his way out of the move and bridged Helmsley into a pinning position and scored the three-count.

Triple-H ruined Michaels' moment of glory by hitting HBK with his trusty sledgehammer twice. But Helmsley's despicable act couldn't change the fact that at least on this night, Michaels was a showstopper once again and the main reason why this bout could turn out to be the Match of the Year.

In other bouts: Brock Lesnar pinned The Rock to capture the WWE World title ... The Undertaker pinned Test ... Rob Van Dam defeated Chris Benoit to win the Intercontinental belt ... World tag team champions Lance Storm & Christian beat Booker T & Goldust ... Edge pinned Eddie Guerrero ... Ric Flair defeated Chris Jericho by submission ... Kurt Angle beat Rey Mysterio Jr. by submission.

Chincoteague, VA **World Renowned Wrestling** **Correspondent: Harry Burkett**

A hardcore streetfighter from Philly met an old-school star of the South in this unusual main event at the Chincoteague Community Center. One of the few things that Rocco Rock and The Stro (formerly The Maestro) have in common, in fact, is that



Rocco Rock didn't fair well against former WCW star The Stro in Chincoteague, Virginia. The Public Enemy member held his own against The Stro, but couldn't defeat him—even with outside interference! Maybe Rocco Rock should stick with tag team wrestling.

they both competed in WCW ... but never against each other.

Rock was hesitant to enter the ring, and The Stro started a "Chicken!" chant with the crowd. The Public Enemy member held his hands over his ears as referee Daryl Lankford started to count him out before the match could even get underway. Rock stood on the ring apron and lured Stro over with some trash talk and then hit him over the head with a plastic bottle of spring water.

The illegal spring water blow had a surprisingly harmful effect. The Stro fell to the canvas and Rock placed his foot over his throat. With The Stro hanging over the middle

rope, Rock ran across the ring and landed across Stro's back.

The Stro rebounded and sent Rock flying with a back body-drop and leveled him with two clotheslines. Rock regained the advantage with dirty tactics, grabbed Stro's arm, walked along the top rope Undertaker-style, and came off the ropes to further wrench the arm. Later, Rock hit Stro with a low blow and delivered a diving headbutt. A dazed Stro surprised him with a small package pin attempt. Rock, however, kicked out.

Soon The Jersey Devil, who had wrestled The Stro earlier in the show, ran to ringside and jumped on the apron. He locked Stro in a full nelson as Rock came off the ropes to deliver an axhandle blow. Stro escaped in the nick of time and rolled up Rock in a small package for the pinfall.

In other bouts: King Tut battled Chewy to a no-contest ... Sweet Destiny beat Lexie Fyfe ... Death Pack defeated Black Panther & Ice Pick ... The Stro pinned The Jersey Devil ... Chris Carnage defeated Ethan Hart ... Phenix defeated Ihum Kamel.

Martinsburg, WV **Championship Pro Wrestling** **Correspondent: Timothy A. Walker**

Demolition Ax and Nikolai Volkoff squared off at the Berkeley County Fairgrounds in this battle of former WWF superstars. The fans cheered Ax as both men tried to use their size and power against each other. Ax gained the early advantage, but the crafty Volkoff hit him repeatedly with a foreign object. It seemed as if the referee was the only person in the vicinity who didn't see the weapon.

Tiring of the official's ineptitude, Ax used a series of closed fists to send Volkoff reeling across the ring. With Volkoff on the mat, Ax twisted and wrenched the Russian's legs. Volkoff managed to reach the ropes.

Volkoff tried to hit Ax with the foreign object again, but Ax blocked his punch and retaliated with a punch of his own. That caused an angry Volkoff to drop the object, which Ax then used on Volkoff several times. Volkoff fell out of the ring at that juncture, and Ax followed him onto the arena floor. As the two veterans brawled all the way back to the locker room, the referee had no choice but to declare the match a double-countout.

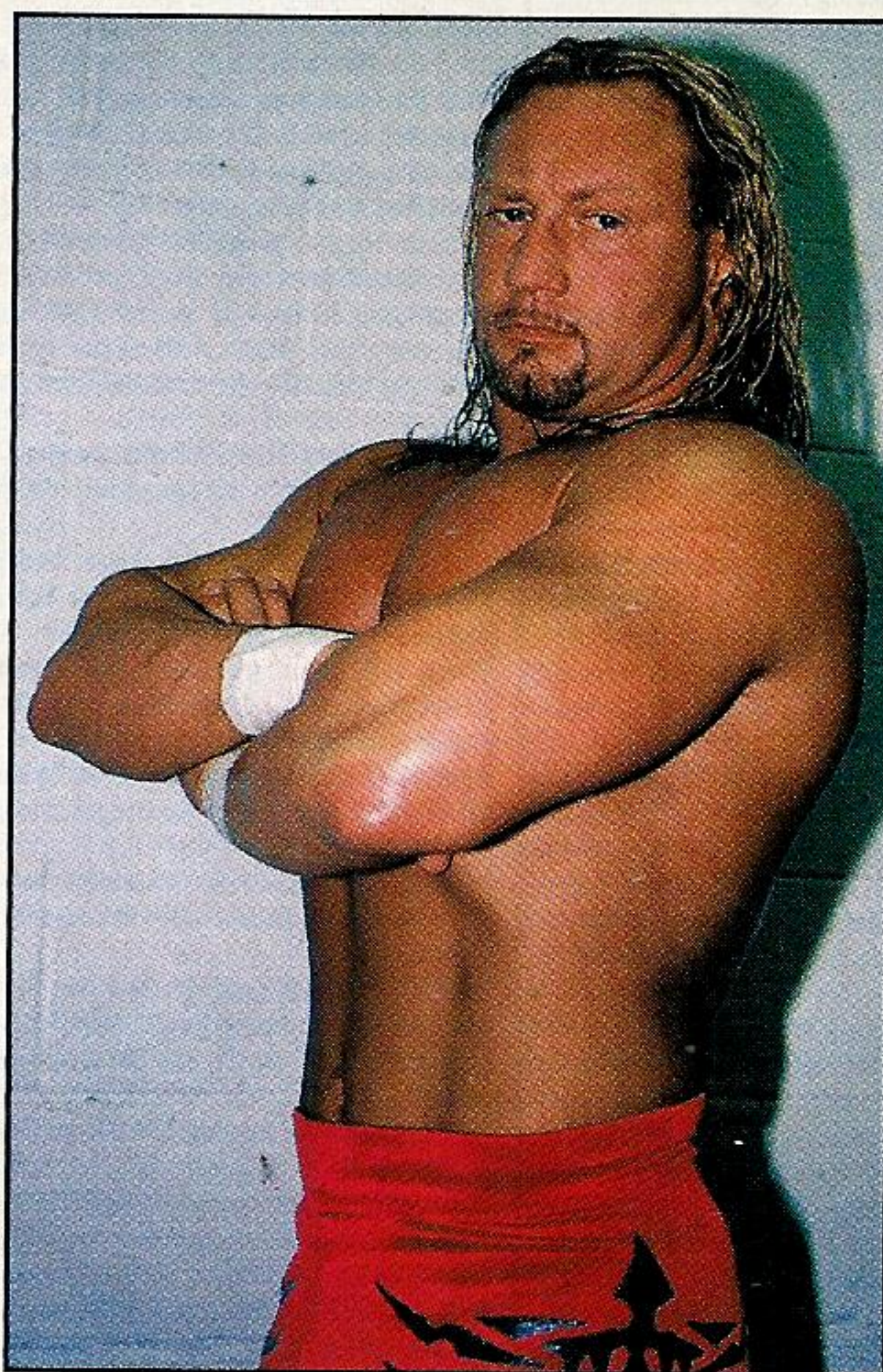
In other bouts: Greg Valentine defeated CPW heavyweight champ Shane Shadows in a non-title match ... Switchblade pinned The Cremator ... Doug Delicious & Danny Woody defeated Brian Johnson & Brock Singleton ... Tommy Hawk pinned Pete Jannings ... Tag team champions John Balsamo & Gino Sarentino beat Maxx Crimson & Mark Mest ... Cabbie pinned Max Havok ... Flayre defeated Tiffani Monroe for the ladies title ... Johnny Graham beat Doc Hollywood. □

Send your reports to:
CORRESPONDENTS EDITOR,
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Wrestler^{THE}

TOP 10

- 1 BROCK LESNAR**
295, Minneapolis, MN
(3) WWE World champion
- 2 THE UNDERTAKER**
304, Dallas, TX
(1) No. 1 contender: WWE World title
- 3 YUJI NAGATA**
228, Tokyo, Japan
(2) IWGP heavyweight champion
- 4 TRIPLE-H**
269, Greenwich, CT
(-) No. 2 contender: WWE World title
- 5 KURT ANGLE**
233, Pittsburgh, PA
(7) No. 3 contender: WWE World title
- 6 GENICHIRO TENRYU**
235, Tokyo, Japan
(5) All-Japan Triple Crown champion
- 7 ROB VAN DAM**
237, Battle Creek, MI
(4) WWE Intercontinental champion
- 8 RON KILLINGS**
230, Charlotte, NC
(-) NWA heavyweight champion
- 9 JERRY LYNN**
216, Minneapolis, MN
(-) NWA-TNA X champion
- 10 EDGE**
240, Toronto, Ontario
(-) No. 5 contender: WWE World title



Jerry Lynn

TAG TEAMS

- 1 CHRISTIAN & LANCE STORM**
Combined weight: 456 pounds
(-) WWE World tag team champions
- 2 TAKESHI MORISHIMA & TAKESHI RIKIOH**
Combined weight: 567 pounds
(2) GHC tag team champions
- 3 BOOKER T & GOLDUST**
Combined weight: 513 pounds
(6) No. 2 team: WWE Raw
- 4 MASA CHONO & HIROYOSHI TENZAN**
Combined weight: 505 pounds
(5) IWGP International tag team champions
- 5 JERRY LYNN & A.J. STYLES**
Combined weight: 418 pounds
(4) No. 1 contenders: NWA tag title
- 6 CHRIS BENOIT & EDDIE GUERRERO**
Combined weight: 447 pounds
(-) No. 1 team: WWE Smackdown
- 7 THE HURRICANE & SHANNON MOORE**
Combined weight: 381 pounds
(-) No. 2 team: WWE Smackdown
- 8 BRIAN ADAMS & BRYAN CLARK**
Combined weight: 622 pounds
(-) All-Japan International tag team champions
- 9 BILLY GUNN & CHUCK PALUMBO**
Combined weight: 524 pounds
(1) No. 3 team: WWE Smackdown
- 10 BUH BUH RAY & SPIKE DUDLEY**
Combined weight: 480 pounds
(-) No. 3 team: WWE Raw

WWE RAW

World Champion:

BROCK LESNAR

(1) 295, Minneapolis, MN

- 1—TRIPLE-H**
(-) 269, Greenwich, CT
- 2—ROB VAN DAM**
(2) 237, Battle Creek, MI
- 3—BOOKER T**
(3) 250, Houston, TX
- 4—CHRIS JERICHO**
(-) 225, Winnipeg, Manitoba
- 5—RIC FLAIR**
(8) 243, Charlotte, NC
- 6—JEFF HARDY**
(4) 209, Cameron, NC
- 7—TOMMY DREAMER**
(-) 265, Yonkers, NY
- 8—TEST**
(-) 282, Toronto, Ontario
- 9—WILLIAM REGAL**
(7) 257, Blackpool, England
- 10—BUH BUH RAY DUDLEY**
(10) 325, Massapequa, NY

WWE SMACKDOWN

World Champion:

BROCK LESNAR

(-) 295, Minneapolis, MN

- 1—THE UNDERTAKER**
(C) 304, Dallas, TX
- 2—KURT ANGLE**
(1) 233, Pittsburgh, PA
- 3—EDGE**
(3) 240, Toronto, Ontario
- 4—CHRIS BENOIT**
(-) 224, Edmonton, Alberta
- 5—JAMIE NOBLE**
(5) 190, Hanover, WV
- 6—REY MISTERIO JR.**
(-) 163, San Diego, CA
- 7—EDDIE GUERRERO**
(-) 223, El Paso, TX
- 8—JOHN CENA**
(-) 260, Los Angeles, CA
- 9—TAJIRI**
(10) 213, Tokyo, Japan
- 10—MATT HARDY**
(-) 213, Cameron, NC

OVW

OVW Champion:

NOVA

(C) 214, Bricktown, NJ

- 1—JOHN CENA**
(-) 260, Los Angeles, CA
- 2—DOUG BASHAM**
(1) 241, Louisville, KY
- 3—NICK DINSMORE**
(2) 226, Jefferson, IN
- 4—DAMAJA**
(4) 240, Seymour, IN
- 5—ROB CONWAY**
(3) 240, Pittsburgh, PA
- 6—FLASH**
(7) 225, Detroit, MI
- 7—R.C. HAAS**
(-) 265, Edmond, OK
- 8—MARK JINDRAK**
(-) 253, Auburn, NY
- 9—LANCE CADE**
(-) 253, San Antonio, TX
- 10—SEVEN**
(8) 278, Memphis, TN

HWA

HWA Champion:

CODY HAWK

(7) 220, Malibu Beach, CA

- 1—MATT STRYKER**
(6) 220, Cincinnati, OH
- 2—B.J. WHITMER**
(-) 210, Owensboro, KY
- 3—CHET JABLONSKI**
(8) 230, Buffalo, NY
- 4—NIGEL McGUINNESS**
(-) 220, London, England
- 5—DEAN JABLONSKI**
(10) 280, Buffalo, NY
- 6—MARK MATTIS**
(-) 230, parts unknown
- 7—RORY FOX**
(-) 205, Watkins, IA
- 8—PSYCHO SARGE**
(-) 210, Camp Lejeune, NC
- 9—MATT DILLINGER**
(-) 203, Rockdale, TN
- 10—BROTHER CLAY**
(-) 225, Memphis, TN

OFFICIAL RATINGS

Top 10 and Tag Team ratings are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and inherent skill of each wrestler or team. These ratings are compiled by the magazine's editorial board. All other ratings are based on the official current positions of challengers to the top title in each category; certain titleholders receive an automatic spot in the ratings. The number in parentheses indicates a wrestler's position in that category last issue; (-) indicates that the wrestler was not rated in that category last issue while (C) indicates the wrestler was champion in that category last issue. Note: In an effort to keep the ratings as up-to-date as possible, these pages are often the last to be sent to the printer. Thus, the ratings may reflect changes not reflected in the remainder of the issue.

For period ended September 1, 2002

3PW: Champion—Gary Wolfe; 1—Kevin Sullivan; 2—Bam Bam Bigelow; 3—Dusty Rhodes; 4—Christian York; 5—Rocco Rock; 6—Danny Doring; 7—Joey Matthews; 8—Chris Chetti; 9—The Blue Meanie; 10—Devon Storm.

ALL PRO WRESTLING: Champion—Robert Thompson; 1—Larry Blackwell; 2—American Dragon; 3—Christopher Daniels; 4—Jardi Frantz; 5—James Choi; 6—Kafu; 7—James Watkins; 8—Samoa Joe; 9—Nikki; 10—JoJo Fantastico.

CENTRAL WRESTLING ALLIANCE: Champion—Syxe; 1—Terry Alan; 2—Rick Morton; 3—Mongoose; 4—Shane Lewis; 5—Jimmy Valiant; 6—Miss Diamond; 7—Maddawg; 8—Tommy Green; 9—Buddy Landell; 10—J-Ice.

CHAMPIONSHIP PRO WRESTLING: Champion—Greg Valentine; 1—Shane Shadows; 2—Demolition Ax; 3—Doug Delicious; 4—Johnny Graham; 5—Switchblade; 6—Nikolai Volkoff; 7—Brock Singleton; 8—Brian Johnson; 9—Doc Hollywood; 10—John Balsamo.

EXODUS WRESTLING ALLIANCE: Champion—George South Sr.; 1—Rick Morton; 2—Jimmy Valiant; 3—Buddy Landell; 4—George South Jr.; 5—Jason King; 6—Scotty McKeever; 7—Iron Sheik; 8—Rick Karloff; 9—Jon Adcox; 10—Cruel Connection II.

HCW CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Stan Sierra; 1—Ric Gunner; 2—Brock Landers; 3—Shawn Christopher; 4—I.M. Smooth; 5—Stevie Phillips; 6—Louisville Mugger; 7—Alex Walker; 8—Scrap Dogg; 9—John Grizzly; 10—Chosen One.

IPW Hardcore Wrestling: Champion—Agent Steele; 1—Rod Steel; 2—Scoot Andrews; 3—Pat McGroin; 4—Billy Fives; 5—Danny Doring; 6—Mike Sullivan; 7—AXIS; 8—Prime Evil; 9—Michael Shane; 10—Horace Hogan.

NATIONAL WRESTLING LEAGUE: Champion—John Rambo; 1—King Kong Bundy; 2—Doink the Clown; 3—Aidean; 4—The Patriot; 5—Spazman Anthony; 6—Hyjinx; 7—Flex Fenom; 8—Gangrel; 9—Jake Davis; 10—Samu.

NEW ERA PRO WRESTLING: Champion—Chris Hamrick; 1—Aero; 2—Julio Dinero; 3—M-Dogg 20; 4—Red; 5—J-Rocc; 6—Blackhammer; 7—Prince Juggalo; 8—Chi Chi Cruz; 9—Kidd Quick; 10—The Sandman.

NWA SOUTHWEST: Champion—J.P. Black; 1—Steve DeMarco; 2—Devastator; 3—Chris Young; 4—Razor Fixx; 5—Bobby 2 Badd; 6—Psycho Simpson; 7—Larry Green; 8—The Natural; 9—Kyser Douglas; 10—Chaz Taylor.

TEXAS CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Krusher Kong; 1—Kevin Dark; 2—Gary Tool; 3—Mike Thunder; 4—John Allen; 5—Gemini; 6—Aldo Nova; 7—Samir; 8—Tyler Bateman; 9—Chance Romance; 10—Brad Michaels.

WORLD XTREME WRESTLING: Champion—Samoan Storm; 1—The Sandman; 2—Wenzel; 3—Samu; 4—Sugaa; 5—Malachi; 6—Big Dawg Molsonn; 7—Gene Snisky; 8—L.A. Smooth; 9—Nuisance; 10—Brian Anthony.

NWA

NWA Champion:

RON KILLINGS

(-) 230, Charlotte, NC

1—KEN SHAMROCK

(C) 249, San Bernardino, CA

2—HOTSTUFF HERNANDEZ

(2) 280, Houston, TX

3—QUINN MAGNUM

(1) 265, Pittsburgh, PA

4—SHINYA HASHIMOTO

(4) 287, Gifu, Japan

5—DAN SEVERN

(3) 262, Coldwater, MI

6—A.J. STYLES

(6) 202, Gainesville, GA

7—JOHNNY MOSS

(-) 240, Egremont, England

8—SPYDER

(5) 225, New York, NY

9—J.P. BLACK

(-) 230, San Antonio, TX

10—DAVID YOUNG

(-) 246, Memphis, TN

NWA-TNA

NWA Champion:

RON KILLINGS

(-) 230, Charlotte, NC

1—JERRY LYNN

(-) 216, Minneapolis, MN

2—JEFF JARRETT

(-) 230, Nashville, TN

3—LOW-KI

(-) 170, Brooklyn, NY

4—A.J. STYLES

(-) 202, Gainesville, GA

5—KEN SHAMROCK

(-) 249, San Bernardino, CA

6—BRIAN LAWLER

(-) 230, Memphis, TN

7—MALICE

(-) 308, Ocean Grove, NJ

8—GRAN APOLO

(-) 225, San Juan, Puerto Rico

9—RED

(-) 147, Brooklyn, NY

10—KID KASH

(-) 202, Johnson City, TN

JAPAN

1—YUJI NAGATA

(1) 228, Tokyo, Japan
IWGP heavyweight champion

2—GENICHIRO TENRYU

(2) 235, Tokyo, Japan
All-Japan Triple Crown champion

3—YOSHINARI OGAWA

(3) 202, Fichigi, Japan
GHC heavyweight champion

4—KEIJI MUTO

(5) 245, Yamanashi, Japan

5—KOJI KANEMOTO

(10) 205, Osaka, Japan

6—KENDO KA SHIN

(-) 195, Tokyo, Japan

7—MASA CHONO

(-) 235, Tokyo, Japan

8—YOSHIHIRO TAKAYAMA

(-) 270, Sapporo, Japan

9—SATOSHI KOJIMA

(7) 223, Tokyo, Japan

10—SHINYA HASHIMOTO

(8) 287, Gifu, Japan

MEXICO

1—HECTOR GARZA

(3) 220, Monterrey, Mexico
AAA heavyweight champion

2—UNIVERSO DOS MIL

(2) 240, Mexico City, Mexico
CMLL heavyweight champion

3—BLACK TIGER

(9) 193, Mexico City, Mexico

4—LATIN LOVER

(1) 190, Monterrey, Mexico

5—LA PARKA

(10) 235, Torreon, Mexico

6—FELINO

(-) 165, Mexico City, Mexico

7—EL HIJO DEL SANTO

(4) 180, Tulancingo, Mexico

8—OCTAGON

(-) 180, Monterrey, Mexico

9—BLACK WARRIOR

(-) 221, Mexico City, Mexico

10—REY MISTERIO SR.

(-) 183, Mexico City, Mexico

WOW[®]

Remember Him?



Of course you remember him! It doesn't matter that this picture was taken more than two full decades ago. Twenty years of battle after feud after epic war haven't changed Ric Flair quite that much. And the "Nature Boy" hasn't made that many changes in his appearance, either. But this is one photograph from our vast Flair archives that really jumps out at us. Think Flair has had some bloodfests since rejoining Vince McMahon's company last November? You're right—he has. But Flair was one of the all-time bleeders when he was in his prime. And when a man with Flair's hair color bleeds and bleeds, it can make for some interesting yet disturbing visuals. This is one of those visuals, although Flair doesn't appear to be disturbed by it.

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